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Embedded Narratives: Story-Tellers of the Brontë Novels

by

Wendy Rene Rabel ©

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of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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It takes a good story to make the imagination respond. It takes a good story but also one that is written in interesting ways.

- R. Rawdon Wilson

Abstract

Although the primary narrators of the Brontë novels have received significant critical study, the subsidiary narrators and their smaller embedded narratives have been largely overlooked. Identified by a shift in voice, embedded narratives function to reveal character, further the plot, and enhance the themes of the novels through a variety of techniques: Language, rhetoric, and tone point to the motives that lie behind the words and the dynamics that exist between the speaker and interlocutor. These narratives provide alternative perspectives, allowing information to enter the text that the primary narrator cannot or will not communicate. Through the subjectivity of the narrators, the embedded narratives bring an understanding of character and events that would not be possible without their presence in the novel. Anne, Emily, and Charlotte Brontë each uses embedded narratives differently, but in each case, they are an important part of the larger novel, and create a layering of the story that brings drama to the telling.

Dedication

My thesis is dedicated to all those who have had a part in its completion. Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Juliet McMaster, whose patience, wisdom, and expertise have been invaluable. Thank you to all of my family, and especially my parents, whose love and support have brought me to this point and allowed me to pursue my dreams, and to my grandmother who has taught me that learning never stops. To my Roland, thank you for your unconditional love and for being the one who has carried me – you have helped me to believe in myself and to reach for the stars. To Liza, thank you for your friendship and kindred spirit. I have been so fortunate to have had teachers that have inspired me: Dr. Timothy McNamara, Dr. Neil Querengesser, Dr. Catherine Eddy, Dr. Marco Loverso, Dr. Wayne Stuhlmiller, and others that I admire and thank for their contributions to my education and their encouragement. I thank God, who has led me down a different path than I had planned, but in doing so, has given me an appreciation for the important things in life and has blessed me more than I could have imagined.

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Introduction

The narrators of the Brontë novels are a popular subject for criticism and debate. Although much has been written about the primary narrators (e.g. Helen Huntingdon, Lockwood, Nelly Dean, Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe), the embedded narratives of other characters (e.g. Arthur Huntingdon, Isabella Linton, Edward Rochester) have been largely ignored by critics. This thesis analyzes individually and as a collective these narratives used by the Brontë sisters in their novels: *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), by Anne Brontë; *Wuthering Heights* (1847), by Emily Brontë; *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853), by Charlotte Brontë.

An embedded narrative can be recognized by a shift in voice in the text. The primary narrators tell the bulk of the story to the reader and there may be one or more narrators that fall under this definition: The primary narrator tells much of the story and threads individual events and characters together. For example, Helen Huntingdon's narrative is embedded in that of Gilbert Markham, and Nelly Dean's narrative in that of Lockwood; however, Helen's and Nelly's stories do not fall into the category of "embedded narratives" as discussed in this thesis as they share the primary narrator role due to the length and scope of their narration. An embedded narrative is told by one character (there are no narratives embedded within), about a specific event (e.g. Heathcliff's story of his and Catherine's experience at Thrushcross Grange), or gives an explanation for current circumstances (e.g. Rochester's Bertha Mason narrative). Although there are similarities between primary and secondary (embedded) narratives, the latter is distinguished from the former by its shorter length and limited scope.

When the primary narrator passes the narratorial baton, making room for another character to tell his or her story, there is a significant change in the tone, language, and purpose of the narration. Subsidiary narrators use speech or the written word to further their own agendas internal to the story. When an embedded narrative appears, there is a revelation of the character who is speaking and insight into or effect on the chosen interlocutor. Through tone, language, rhetoric, and the dynamics between the speaker and listener, the embedded narratives create vivid moments in the text that remain with the reader long after the book is closed.

The term embedded narrative is taken from narratology. Wallace Martin refers to "embedded narration – a story told by a character in a story" (135). Gerald Prince refers to "secondary narrators" or "tertiary narrators" (16). Patrick O'Neil calls this type of narrative "nested," in which the narrator is "focalizing his narrative through the eyes of one (or several) of the characters rather than his own . . . while characters themselves can also be narrators (and focalizers) *within* the story and address their narratives to other characters who then serve as narratees, and so on in a potentially infinite regress of stories within stories" (112), for example, the structure of *Wuthering Heights*. Mieke Bal describes embedded narratives in this way: "the narrative text constitutes a whole, into which, from the narrator's text, other texts are embedded. The dependence of the actor's text with regard to the narrator's text should be seen as the dependence of a subordinate clause to a main clause" (52). Bal's analogy accurately describes the relationship between the main text and the embedded narrative – the latter relies on the former for context, and therefore, meaning, while the main text relies on these narratives as a support system. The embedded narratives cannot exist without the main text, and they are crucial to the success of the novel as a whole.

In *Shakespearean Narrative*, Rawdon Wilson studies the embedded narratives of Shakespeare's drama and poetry. He looks at the narrative segments, exploring the way in which Shakespeare uses them to further plot and develop character. He describes "how often and with what skills different characters halt the action of the plays and start telling stories. The dramatic action freezes about them and everyone, including the audience, is transported into a narrative world" (9). For Wilson, the embedded narratives take the listener/reader into another time and place outside the action of the play (for example, Titania's narrative in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). In the Brontë novels, the characters take the listener/reader to another time and place, but the narrative connects directly to the larger story, bringing an illumination of character and detail and creating tension through the subjectivity of the narrator.

The issue of subjectivity is of special interest in the Brontë novels. Characteristically, the Brontës employ a first-person character narrator that relates the bulk of the story, connecting events and introducing other characters (who often go on to narrate). The only digression from this form is in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, in which she presents the story through a third-person narrator. As I argue in the chapter on Charlotte's novels, this choice affects her ability to effectively construct the story through her narrator, and the novel's quality suffers as a result. The first-person form brings a subjectivity to the novels that allows for an intimate look at events and characters that carries into the embedded narratives.

Wilson argues that embedded narratives are important to the larger work in that they provide unique perspectives, and "the more perspectives upon a literary text that we possess, the more deeply we can understand it . . . one should never pass up an insight, a useful grip upon the text's twisting web" (46). This statement holds true for the embedded narratives in the Brontë novels in that they are sites where vivid images and powerful language create a change in perspective that provides the reader with alternative points of view and adds to the development of the world inside the story.

The embedded narrative differs from an earlier form, the interpolated tale, that appears in novels of the eighteenth century. The distinction between the two lies in their integration into the text and their effect on the listener/reader: The interpolated tale interrupts the forward motion of the plot in order to make way for an extended narrative by a character telling his or her history (often in a separate chapter); an embedded narrative appears with a smoother transition into a subsidiary narrative voice and is more dramatic in its presentation because of its impact on the larger story.

There are three types of embedded narratives in the Brontë novels: (1) Those that focus on the speaker; (2) those that focus on the interlocutor; (3) those that function as a plot device. There are often combinations of these functions, and each narrative has its own intricacies. An embedded narrative constitutes a segment of the text marked by a shift in voice that takes the listener/reader to another time and place.

Although the Brontës all use this technique in their novels, each has her own way of incorporating the narratives into the text and presenting them to the reader. Anne Brontë conveys the frustrations of the class divide, and the narratives that appear in *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* contribute primarily to character development in a succinct, efficient way. She portrays the life of a governess and the clash between religious piety and debauchery through the interplay of the speaker and interlocutor. Emily Brontë is, by far, the most dramatic of her sisters, using her narratives to convey an emotionally charged world. The characters of her narratives are impulsive and overflow with strong expressions of feeling. Her embedded narratives contain the arc of the story, following two generations within the framework of Lockwood and Nelly Dean's narratives. For Charlotte Brontë, the embedded narrative is an opportunity to exhibit the power struggle inherent in all relationships, especially those between men and women, and the difficulty of establishing an identity. She attempts to create balance between opposing forces acting upon individuals and places the narratives at crucial moments in her stories in order to achieve it.

The embedded narrative, when used to its greatest effect, is a powerful tool. It is in these sections that the reader is taken to the heart of the novel and is allowed to peer inside the mind of the narrators. They highlight pivotal events, themes, and provide insight into character and plot. In this type of narrative the author can portray the complexities of motive behind a given character's actions, adding layers to the story in order to create a believable world in which the characters exist. The embedded narratives are an integral part of the structure of the novels as they support the surrounding story by adding to the richness of its telling. The focus of this thesis is on the embedded narratives, how they are used, and what techniques are employed within them in order to advance their function as important components of the narrative whole.

Chapter One
Anne Brontë: Hidden Treasure

The works of Anne Brontë have, until recently, been the subject of harsh criticism, resulting in the general dismissal of her works as inferior to those of her sisters. This type of evaluation has been based not on fair-minded readings of the texts, but on a negative bias that began with Charlotte Brontë and filtered through to critics and readers who approached Anne's novels with a pre-determined view. Fortunately, her novels have been re-examined and she has now gained a stature, at least in critical circles, that is close to that of her sisters. It is the aim of this chapter to demonstrate the merit and strength of Anne's writing on the basis of one particular aspect of her artistry – her skill in telling a story through the use of embedded narratives.

Although there are relatively few examples of embedded narratives in her two novels, excluding Anne from this study would be a mistake, as *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) provide points of comparison in the study of embedded narratives in the Brontë novels. Although *Agnes Grey* is less complex in structure than *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, both novels bear the mark of a great artist at work and stand on their own merits as fine literary productions. Anne's use of embedded narratives in these novels demonstrates her development as a writer and serves to enhance and legitimize the telling of these stories through her emphasis on the elements of rhetoric, tone, and the dynamics of motivation between the speaker and interlocutor.

Agnes Grey

Agnes Grey has been criticized for its simplicity and lack of dramatic content; however, these qualities are better described as strengths. Anne uses the stripped-down narrative as a tool to demonstrate the constriction and repression experienced by her title character in her position as a governess. By using first-person narration, Anne makes Agnes' experiences believable and sympathetic, demonstrating her isolation and revealing the interior workings of the mind of an individual in her position.

Agnes' narrative continues, nearly uninterrupted, throughout the entire novel with the exception of three embedded narratives, given by Nancy Brown, Rosalie Murray, and Matilda Murray. Her strong narrative voice keeps the focus locked on Agnes throughout the novel. By including these narratives, Agnes allows the speakers to reveal certain facets of their characters. In the case of Nancy Brown, Agnes listens to a narrative that reinforces both her feelings of friendship and compassion for this woman and her respect for Mr. Weston; Rosalie's narrative portrays her shallow, cruel nature in contrast to Agnes' own approach to life, and Matilda Murray's narrative reveals the ongoing futility of Agnes' position as a governess. In each case, there is also a revelation of Agnes' character through her motivation in including these narratives.

Nancy Brown's narrative demonstrates the difference between Mr. Hatfield and Mr. Weston, a recurring issue in the text, by placing them in direct contrast in their treatment of her. Agnes listens with interest as Nancy confides her struggle with religious melancholy. Hatfield lacks compassion and the ability to see Nancy as an individual with spiritual needs: "It's always easy to find excuses for shirking one's duty . . . if you do your best to get to Heaven and can't manage it, you must be one of those that seek to enter in at the strait gate and shall not be able" (11.89-90).[1] He dismisses Nancy's worries about her faith, and is cruel to her cat, preferring to seek out Rosalie Murray rather than do his duty as vicar. His manner shows that he cannot explain the scriptures that talk about loving God and others because he does not know how to love.

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[1] For this single-volume work, I will refer to quotations with the chapter and page numbers. Multi-volume references contain the volume, chapter and page numbers. All texts are Oxford World's Classics editions.

In contrast, Mr. Weston comes to visit Nancy without her asking after hearing Hatfield call her "a canting old fool" (92). He is kind to her (and to her cat), "clarifying" Hatfield's words (covering for his superior) and putting them in terms that Nancy can understand; he gives her comfort by telling her how she can apply what he has told her in her daily life. He listens to Nancy, "as steady an' patient as could be, an' never a bit o' scorn about him" (93). He also takes the time to read the Bible to her and to explain the verses "as clear as the day" (94). Weston's approach is people centred, as opposed to Hatfield's cold, distant manner, and it is effective. The relief that he brings makes Nancy feel that "a new light broke in on my soul" (94). She is inspired to be kind and describes herself as "happy" as a result of the change that has taken place: "It's turned out just as Maister Weston said" (95). Attributing her new-found happiness to Mr. Weston, Nancy does not realize that she has made a change in herself. It is a change that could not, however, have occurred without the kind, personal care given by Mr. Weston, a point that is not lost on Agnes.

As listener to this narrative, Agnes is interested in what Nancy has to say because she cares about her, but she is also taking note of what is being said about Mr. Weston. She has no illusions about the typical manner of Mr. Hatfield and is not surprised by his conduct; however, she responds to Nancy's story about Weston's help with questions and comments to keep her talking about him: "But what did Mr. Weston say then?" (93); "Did Mr. Weston ever come to see you again?" (95). Agnes is interested in hearing about the man in whom she is interested because it pleases her to hear of his goodness – a refreshing change from the world of Horton Lodge. She places this narrative in her story to reinforce the contrast between Weston, who is more like her, and Hatfield, who resembles Rosalie Murray.

The contrast between Hatfield and Weston in Nancy Brown's narrative appears again in the narrative of Rosalie Murray. The fact that Agnes allows Rosalie to take over the narrative, however briefly, places emphasis on this section. Rosalie functions as a foil to Agnes' character, and this simple shift in voice accelerates their growing rivalry. When Rosalie's becomes the narrative voice, there is a vivid demonstration of the opposite ways in which she and Agnes approach the world – a difference that is revealed by the juxtaposition of their voices. This narrative places Agnes and Rosalie in contrast in regard to their interactions with men and the way in which they react to emotionally charged situations. There is also a display of the subtly antagonistic, adversarial nature of their relationship that is a focus of the novel.

Anne Brontë creates tension by placing an encounter between Agnes and Mr. Weston immediately preceding Rosalie's narrative in which she describes her very different meeting with Mr. Hatfield, the man on whom her coquettish energies have been focused. This strategy allows for a comparison between Agnes and Rosalie in similar situations and creates an atmosphere of contention. Agnes' account is brief and describes the "quiet, unaffected way" of Mr. Weston (14.119). She is impressed by his compassion and his manner, setting up a contrast with Mr. Hatfield's behaviour toward Rosalie. Agnes preserves the quiet dignity of the encounter with a brief and appropriate re-telling that emphasizes the developing yet unspoken affection between herself and the curate. She describes Weston as if she were observing him from a distance, in keeping with the interior focus of her narrative and her attempt to present herself in an objective voice. Agnes comfortably reveals the inner effect that Weston has upon her from the remove of retrospection. There are no references to her outward responses in the moment, but Agnes is able to describe her thoughts and emotions after Mr. Weston departs. Her intent as a story-teller is to reveal her inner experience, but she is reluctant to fully disclose those things that are impressed so deeply upon her mind that she thinks of them "in the course of that day and many succeeding ones" (119). Her concern about how she will be perceived as a result of her "confession" reveals Agnes' awareness of her audience; however, she is able to confide her experience because she is secure in her anonymity: "they that read it will not know the writer" (119). In her careful re-telling Agnes demonstrates the purposeful construction of her narrative with her concern over her private thoughts and feelings being made public.

The transition into Rosalie Murray's narrative is abrupt. Immediately after seeing Mr. Weston, Agnes is "walking along, happy within, and pleased with all around" when Rosalie comes "hastening to meet [her]" (119). Agnes is able to describe Rosalie's mood just by observing her "buoyant step, flushed cheek, and radiant smiles" (119). These visible manifestations are very different from the way Agnes responds to Mr. Weston. Her happiness is a private experience, with the reader having the only access, albeit carefully censored, to her thoughts. In contrast, Rosalie is eager to reveal all to Agnes, whom she chooses to listen to her news. It is clear that Agnes is prepared for Rosalie's narrative when she describes Rosalie as "happy, in her own way" (119). Agnes makes a distinction between the happiness that she is feeling and that which Rosalie exhibits. It is clear that Agnes believes true happiness comes from a genuine friendship and a warm exchange; consequently, she assumes that because Rosalie has not demonstrated a capacity to be affected by a sentimental moment, she has been made happy by a different type of experience. Agnes takes care to distance herself from Rosalie's behaviour and the flaw in character that it demonstrates. In this section in particular, she reinforces their differences before Rosalie begins to tell her story, in effect creating a subtle bias in the reader's reception of her words.

The sudden transition from Agnes' silent joy to Rosalie's breathless story creates the break in the narrative voice. Rosalie physically takes Agnes' arm as if she is forcibly taking hold of the narrative and, "without waiting to recover breath" (119), begins with the revelation that Agnes is the first to hear her "news" before she has "breathed a word of it to any one else" (119). Immediately, there is an awareness of the dramatic change in narratorial style, evidenced in Rosalie's bright tone and enthusiastic delivery. Anne Brontë uses this shift to show the line of demarcation between the world of the governess and that of someone in Rosalie's position. Rosalie's voice, in addition to her conduct, are very different from Agnes'. She is aggressive in her story-telling and demonstrates a lack of restraint – the quality on which Agnes places so much emphasis throughout the novel. The implication of this difference is that Rosalie, having a higher social standing, has a stronger voice; however, her power is thwarted by the fact that it is Agnes who has ultimate control over the narrative. Throughout the story, Agnes is powerless to enact change in her world because of her social position; it is only through control of her own story that she is able to achieve agency.

Rosalie's narrative is characterized by excitement because she sees an opportunity to play, with her words and with Agnes. She begins by telling Agnes only a portion of what took place, promising to give her the whole story "another time," manufacturing suspense and the interest of her captive listener: "Hatfield was most uncommonly audacious, unspeakably complimentary, and unprecedentedly tender . . . I'll tell you all he said another time" (120). Rosalie's use of hyperbolic adverbs is designed to emphasize her delight in her triumph over Hatfield as well as to bait Agnes into a desire to hear the details. This ploy is effective in that it prompts Agnes to ask for more information, a somewhat surprising response in light of the fact that she avoids any details about what was said during her encounter with Mr. Weston. Rosalie is happy to oblige, but again does not fully answer, redirecting her response to include, by design, the revelation that "he actually – made me an offer" (120). It is only after she has captured Agnes' attention that Rosalie moves into the heart of her story; for to tell a story without the attention of and effect on the listener that she desires would be a pointless exercise.

Rosalie is in her element while she delivers the details with a palpable glee. Although she has actively pursued the attention and affection of Mr. Hatfield, she turns on him upon his confirmed reciprocation, behaving with "greatest coolness" and "astonishment," as though she does not understand how he could have come to the point of proposing. She revels in the response that she is able to provoke – the ultimate aim of her actions: "You should have *seen* how his countenance fell" (120).

Rosalie shows none of the signs of self-consciousness that Agnes displayed in her narrative about Weston: "Oh, if you had seen how dreadfully mortified he was – how crushed to the earth by his disappointment! really, I almost pitied him myself!"(120). Enjoying the moment, both in remembering her triumph over Hatfield and the present telling Agnes, Rosalie boasts of her ability to control a man's heart and to keep her own emotions in check. This ability gives her a feeling of power and the hunger for this sensation is the driving force behind her behaviour. Not only is she able to humiliate Hatfield, she shows Agnes her power, making her see the disparity between them. Rosalie's desire to flaunt her power in front of Agnes reveals that she is unsatisfied with her position – it is not enough to hold the power, she must demonstrate it repeatedly to make herself feel superior.

Hatfield asks Rosalie to keep this "affair" quiet and promises that, if she will "keep silent about it, there need be no unpleasantness on either side" (121). Although his threat is clearly implied, there is no concern on Rosalie's behalf as she is telling Agnes every detail at the first opportunity, demonstrating her awareness of the power she holds and her utter disregard for any consequences that may result from her actions. Hatfield tries to escape the situation with his dignity, but Rosalie has insured that he cannot because she has enticed and humiliated him at her whim, and verbally displays her triumph as soon as she is able.

Rosalie insures that the hurt she has inflicted on Hatfield will stay with him long after they part. She "promises" that she will not disclose his humiliation to anyone; however, she does this "to get rid of him" (123) and he leaves "with a look where pride vainly struggled against despair" (123). Rosalie seals her victory by relating the story to Agnes and admitting that she will tell her sister and mother as well, insuring her dominance because it is her version of events that will circulate before Hatfield has a chance to slander her publicly. Rosalie has no fear and is not ashamed of her own behaviour; she puts him on display in order to expose and mock him, using words as her weapon. Her satisfaction is complete when she is able to relive the experience by relating it to another person and to enjoy the reactions of one who disapproves of her behaviour. She is able to dispose of Hatfield and make Agnes squirm with discomfort and a measure of jealousy in the same breath.

This section of the novel provides a pointed example of the type of behaviour that Agnes wishes the reader to observe in Rosalie. She has carefully selected this event to demonstrate her disgust with Rosalie's shallow and cruel manner and to continue to portray Rosalie's character as beneath her own. Anne Brontë shifts the narrative voice to highlight the contrast between Agnes and Rosalie in their parallel accounts and to demonstrate the power struggle between them. Although Rosalie technically has more power because of her social position, it is Agnes who is able to control the information that is provided to the reader. This control is demonstrated at the conclusion of this chapter when Agnes resumes the primary narrative voice and criticizes Rosalie: "She left me, offended at my want of sympathy, and thinking, no doubt, that I envied her. I did not – at least, I firmly believe I did not. I was sorry for her" (124-25). There is a clear restoration here of Agnes' voice in the narrative and a growing sense of her resentment of Rosalie in her denial of her feelings of envy. Agnes' remarks frame Rosalie's narrative and reveal her "amazement" and "disgust" at Rosalie's "heartless vanity" (125). There is a double meaning to Rosalie's narrative created in Agnes' remarks that follow: Rosalie has her own motives in sharing her story, but Agnes also has an agenda in her inclusion of Rosalie's words. Agnes presents a scathing judgement, revealing that she believes she has the qualities of morality and wisdom that she sees lacking in Rosalie. She also perceives a divine injustice in the fact that Rosalie has been given the beauty that Agnes believes she deserves: "I wondered why so much beauty should be given to those who made so bad a use of it, and denied to some who would make it a benefit to both themselves and others" (125). This observation reveals Agnes' envy, but she is quick to cover it by falling back on her religious beliefs: "But, God knows best, I concluded" (125). Her conclusion on the matter, however, is a rather sarcastic justification of Rosalie's existence: "There are, I suppose, some men as vain, as selfish, and as heartless as she is, and perhaps such women may be useful to punish them" (125). With this statement Agnes places Rosalie's narrative in a moral context and attempts to shape the reader's evaluation of her conduct; however, she is not simply an intrusive narrator. Anne Brontë insures that Agnes' moralizing cannot be wholly accepted at face value because of the envy and resentment implied in her words, allowing for a more objective judgment and pointing to Agnes' motives in relating this incident.

The juxtaposition of Agnes and Rosalie continues to the end of the novel where Agnes is rewarded for her perseverance and morality with a marriage to Mr. Weston and Rosalie is doomed to a miserable existence, married to a man she despises. The strength of this final image is facilitated by the parallels between Agnes and Rosalie, reinforcing their different realities. Although Rosalie's narrative is short, it creates a strong, lasting image of the two women in contrast, emphasizing Agnes' overwhelming sense of powerlessness and heightening the effect of the conclusion.

Matilda Murray's hunting narrative is brief, but it is placed in the novel to demonstrate the continuing difficulties of Agnes' position. Matilda is Rosalie's sister, and they have very different personalities; however, Matilda provides Agnes with an equal challenge. With Rosalie's marriage and departure, Mrs. Murray has turned her attention to her other daughter, giving Agnes the task of transforming Matilda from the masculine, crude girl that she is into a proper lady. However, Agnes has little, if any, influence on her, pointing once again to the futility of her attempts to do the job that is expected of her. On a walk with Agnes and Mr. Weston, Matilda breaks away from them and kills a rabbit. She returns with her prize and relishes the details of the kill: "I pretended to want to save it . . . but I was better pleased to see it killed . . .Wasn't it a noble chase? . . . Didn't you see how it doubled . .. and didn't you hear it scream? . . It cried out just like a child" (18.155). What is notable here is the lack of a strong reaction from Agnes. She does not become upset about Matilda's killing of the hare, other than to express her displeasure – "Poor little thing!" (155), or the fact that Mrs. Murray would be displeased. Agnes' focus has shifted away from the worry of being a governess to the warmth of her relationship with Weston that provides an outlet for her frustrations and diminishes the feeling of her own powerlessness.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

If the major criticism of *Agnes Grey* has been its apparent simplicity and lack of dramatic content, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has been received harshly because of its complexity and its disturbing details. In her second novel, Anne takes on a significantly more complicated narrative structure: "After the relatively simple chronology and straight-forward plan of *Agnes Grey*, this more complex, varied design certainly demonstrates Anne Brontë's artistic growth and her willingness to experiment with her medium" (Berry 72). Despite its quality, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is "the least read and most misjudged" of all the Brontë novels (Bell 40) and has suffered an unjust fate due to the controversy surrounding its content, Charlotte's interference, and those who have made a similar error in evaluating this novel as with *Agnes Grey*, taking a negative view on the assumption that the novel is based on biography (specifically, the problems of Anne's brother, Branwell). In the context of its time, and in comparison to its predecessor, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a radical novel; the difference between the two novels is articulated by Elizabeth Langland: "Instead of presenting the quiet story of one individual's growth related through that individual's perspective, Anne Brontë's second novel details the growth or deterioration of several characters and employs a sophisticated technique of layered narratives" (Langland 118). Anne brought forth her creative fires in the construction of this novel and her technique shines in the embedded narratives of its pages.

Included in Elizabeth Langland's work on Anne Brontë are references to "layered" and "nested" narratives (*Anne Brontë: The Other One* and "The Voicing of Feminine Desire in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," respectively). She uses these terms to describe the narrative structure of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and specifically Anne's use of two primary narrators, Gilbert Markham and Helen Huntingdon. Langland does not, however, discuss the smaller embedded narratives that are central to the construction of theme and character. Langland's focus on narrative technique is also limited to Anne's second novel, excluding mention of her first (and of the other Brontë novels). Her characterization of the major narrative sections as "nested" and "layered" is relevant to this discussion in that Langland's insights may be applied to these sections as well as to the novel as a whole.

Brontë's creation of a structure divided into three primary parts, Gilbert Markham's narrative (in two parts), framing Helen Huntingdon's (in the form of a journal), facilitates the introduction of lengthier and more developed embedded narratives than in

Agnes Grey; it is "these alternative narratives . . . competing for our attention . . . that shape the meaning of [the novel]" (Gordon 719). Each volume contains embedded narratives, a factor that impacts the perception of the purpose and meaning of the passages within the larger context of the novel, furthering the plot, providing information about the speaker and the listener, and demonstrating through speech the dynamics of the world of the novel. It is her control of this complex, challenging narrative format that makes *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Anne's masterpiece.

The first volume contains two embedded narratives; and, although they are brief, they are necessary to demonstrate the central role of gossip in the community: "the first ten chapters of the novel are really nothing more than the attempt of gossip to come to terms with meaning" (Gordon 722). These sections also provide justification for Helen's caution in her interactions with outsiders. She must add her own voice to the others competing for authority in order to redeem her reputation in the eyes of Gilbert Markham.

In the first chapter of volume one, Rose Markham and her mother each delivers a narrative that communicates her view of the new occupant of Wildfell Hall. Anne Brontë focuses on tone and motive here, characterizing gossip as shallow, unreliable, and lacking in the complexities of Helen's diary. The validity given to gossip in this community creates an atmosphere of competition for information without concern for the truth. Helen is objectified by this system, and her worth is measured by the opportunity for gossip that she represents.

In Rose Markham's narrative, her view is shaped by second-hand information given to her by a friend who has visited Wildfell Hall. The excitement with which Rose delivers her narrative is similar to that of Rosalie Murray in *Agnes Grey*. She rushes to share the news of a new tenant and does so to observe the reaction that her words will produce. She describes the source of her information, providing the required credibility to her words for her audience: "You may believe it; for Jane Wilson has seen her. She went with her mother, who, of course, when she heard of a stranger being in the neighbourhood, would be on pins and needles till she had seen her and got all she could out of her" (1.1.12). These women revel in the potential for a good story, but are unable to "elicit a single satisfactory answer, or even casual remark, or chance expression calculated to allay their curiosity, or throw the faintest ray of light upon her history, circumstances, or connexions" (12).

The dissatisfaction of this first encounter leads to more attempts to gain information. Rose reveals that Eliza Millward and her father will visit, and Rose and her mother go to see "the fair recluse" (13) of Wildfell Hall, physically intruding on her privacy. Mrs. Markham then relates the details of the visit to her son, describing Mrs. Graham as "lamentable" in her "ignorance on certain points" and lacking in the "sense to be ashamed of it" (13). Mrs. Markham tells Gilbert of her experience in a matter-of-fact manner; she is condescending in her condemnation of Mrs. Graham for her apparent lack of domestic skills and offers an unsolicited opinion: "though you are alone now, you will not be always so; you *have* been married, and probably – I might say almost certainly – will be again" (13-14). With every word, Mrs. Markham confirms her standing as a gossip trying to extract information for the sake of a good story. She does not just *tell* Gilbert about her visit, she *interprets* it.

In the narratives of his sister and mother, Gilbert reveals his immaturity at this point in the way that he is affected by the views of those around him, allowing them to colour his perceptions of Helen and to influence his subsequent actions. The placement of these narratives in the first chapter begins to establish the dynamics of the community in which Gilbert and Helen interact. At this point in the story, the chatter of the gossips is the only information that Gilbert has about Helen, and the battle for the truth that rages in the novel begins. Although Helen does not realize it, she must clear away the misconceptions about her in order for Gilbert to fully trust and respect her.

Helen's diary shifts the text from Gilbert's written words to her own: "Anne Brontë has made 'authority' in story-telling a key issue. The oral tale here has a free circulation without accountability whereas the written story has an agent who may be held accountable" (Langland 121). Helen gives the narrative voice to Arthur Huntingdon and Mr. Hargrave, demonstrating the strong male presence in her life that has already been established by her narrative being enclosed within Gilbert's. It is in these narratives that Anne Brontë plays with the dual levels of motive, voice, and rhetoric to convey the complex dynamics of the world of the novel. Unlike the straightforward heroine and anti-heroine of *Agnes Grey*, Arthur and Helen represent a blurring of the lines between conceptions of good and evil. Arthur Huntingdon is clearly the villain of the novel, but there are questions as to the measure of blame that he is given for the outcome of his marriage to Helen. There are also doubts as to Helen's status as a righteous heroine because of her willing entry into a marriage to a man whom she knows to be lacking in character and conscience, for the purpose of reforming him. Mr. Hargrave appears to be Helen's friend and a good man, but his true motive is revealed when she repels his sexual advances.

The most important embedded narrative of the novel is Arthur Huntingdon's story of his friend, Lord Lowborough. The occasion, tone, motive, and rhetorical style of this narrative reveal the hidden meaning behind Arthur's words. Helen presents this narrative as an indictment of Arthur's conduct, but it actually demonstrates that the responsibility for their marital discord rests on both Arthur and Helen. It is here that the struggle for power in Arthur and Helen's relationship begins, and much of what happens in the novel can be traced back to this moment. The timing of the narrative, carefully chosen by Arthur, is intriguing as it gives Helen a revealing glance of his character and conduct before they are married. Her decision to become Arthur's wife in spite of this knowledge stands as her indictment. The revelation of Arthur's and Helen's true intent in their relationship is a masterful display of Anne Brontë's command of the embedded narrative. She allows Arthur, the devil of the story, to reveal the failings of the angelic Helen, using only his words to tempt her by appealing to the good in her.

Arthur's narrative is precipitated by Helen's observations about Lord Lowborough and Annabella Wilmot. The mention of this relationship brings Arthur the opportunity to test – and to tempt - his future bride by telling her about Lowborough's past, and his own. The fact that Arthur volunteers the story and all its details gives him power over what information he includes and reveals a design behind his words. He is telling this story to make himself appear as despicable as possible and to tempt Helen into marrying him, not in spite of his obvious short-comings, but because of them. The narrative is as much about Lowborough as it is about Arthur and the lure he sets for his future bride. He uses the troubling experiences of his friend to emphasize his own involvement as a facilitator and a participant in order to watch Helen's reaction. He admits to having "many a laugh" at Lowborough and calls his experiences "a very interesting study" and "sometimes very diverting" (2.22.176). He seeks to create a situation in which he can be assured of his control over Helen and give himself the satisfaction of allowing her to see him for what he is before they are married. She unknowingly becomes the "interesting study" and diversion that Arthur desires.

Arthur's narrative follows a pattern, demonstrating the calculation behind his words: He describes an incident in Lowborough's repeating cycle of giving up one vice and hurtling into the next; Helen interrupts each time with concern about Arthur's involvement, and Arthur then directs his comments to her and continues. This pattern enables him to choose the most disturbing examples of Lowborough's conduct and his own in order to gauge Helen's response. He demonstrates his acute awareness of Helen's presence and of the fact that she is paying more attention to his conduct than to that of Lowborough, keeping her involved in the narrative by deliberately provoking her.

Arthur's tone is jovial as he recounts Lowborough's experiences and his own involvement in them. He laughs frequently "at the recollection of the whole affair" (180), adding to the playful tone of his narrative. Using his charm, Arthur takes an angry response from Helen and converts it into a playful exchange. She is upset by his lack of concern for his friend, but he is taking pleasure in telling his story. His manner silences Helen, and he is able to continue with his tale, a signal that he will be able to deflect her reactions in their future relationship (or at least charm his way out of a tense situation).

Arthur's most troubling example shows Lowborough at his worst. He is addicted to laudanum and out of control, falling seriously ill after an evening of debauchery. Arthur begins this account with a feigned slip of the tongue. He characterizes the evening as "one of our orgies," but then corrects himself for Helen's benefit: "one of our high festivals, I mean" (181). This paltry attempt to hide the true nature of his activities is nothing more than another effort to get a reaction from Helen. He mocks her, changing a reference to questionable behaviour by giving it religious connotations. This correction is laughable; however, he is luring Helen into the trap he has set, believing that she cannot resist the urge to attempt the reformation of such a man. Helen reacts strongly to his comment, causing Arthur to be "startled at the look I turned upon him" (182). He uses the words "high festival" to provoke Helen, and she falls into his trap. He is controlling her reactions by carefully planning his words in order to lead her in a specific direction. His reaction is, however, described by Helen, and it is clear in his quick recovery that the effect of her look was not what she perceived.

Arthur finishes his description of Lowborough's debauchery leading to a "severe brain fever" (182) and is again questioned by Helen. She seems to ignore the details about Lowborough, choosing instead to focus only on Arthur: "What did you think of *yourself*, sir?" (182). He responds by making a speech about the wisdom of moderation in order to "reassure" her that he is not like Lowborough, a fact that is contradicted by the content of his story. To this speech, Arthur adds an attempt at charm, saying that he could never abuse alcohol because "drinking spoils one's good looks" (183). Helen describes him as having a "most conceited smile that ought to have provoked me more than it did" (183), revealing his arrogance and giving a sense of her present perspective on this event. In this comment, Helen admits that Arthur's charm affected her more than she realized at the time and she seems to regret not reacting more strongly to his effort to distract her.

Helen asks if Lowborough benefited from his "advice" on moderation, but she is clearly asking Arthur about his own behaviour. This question leads Arthur into the final section of his story in which Lowborough finally makes a break with his past way of life. This segment of the narrative contains what Arthur has been building towards from the beginning: By describing Lowborough's desire to find a wife to reform him, Arthur makes Helen believe that she can change him in the same way. Arthur has carefully constructed his narrative in order to create an inner desire in Helen to become the angel to his devil. He is telling the story of Lowborough, but Helen receives it as it is intended, an account of Arthur's own debauchery and his need for a good woman to inspire him to change. Arthur emphasizes Lowborough's decision to reform and his conclusion that a wife is "what's wanted to save me" (184). Arthur directly connects Lowborough's story to his own by telling Helen that "my good angel brought me into conjunction with you" (185) and that Lowborough's angel had done the same in his meeting Annabella Wilmot. Arthur scoffs at Lowborough's blindness about his new-found love: "his passion and her art together, have blinded him to everything but her perfections and his amazing good fortune" (186). In Arthur's case, the reverse is true: It is Helen's "passion" in her belief that she can change him and Arthur's "art" that draws her to him. By making Helen see the parallel between Lowborough and Annabella Wilmot and herself and Arthur, he tempts her with the thought of being so adored that she would possess the power to change him.

Arthur tells Helen more of what she wants to hear by quoting Lowborough's description of Annabella as his saviour and reformer:

> She is the most generous, high-minded being that can be conceived of. She will save me, body and soul, from destruction. Already, she has ennobled me in my own estimation, and made me three times better, wiser, greater than I was. Oh! if I had but known her before, how much degradation and misery I should have been spared! But what have I done to deserve so magnificent a creature? (186)

This passage evokes an image of Helen picturing herself as the object of adoration and admiration for what she will do for Arthur. She aims, not just to make him a better man in the present and for the future, but to make him regret his past and wish that he had met her sooner so that he may have avoided the suffering of his present state (as she perceives it). Arthur is clearly not suffering, but rather projecting an image of a man who is in desperate need of a spiritual awakening that can be accomplished only by the love of a good woman. He is playing on her strengths, her religious conviction, goodness, and trust, and manipulating her by turning these qualities into weaknesses.

Arthur uses this narrative to back Helen into a corner. With the knowledge he gives her about his character, she cannot use the excuse that she did not know his true nature before their marriage. He has stolen an avenue of self-righteousness: By marrying Arthur, Helen gives an implied consent to his lifestyle. Helen leaves this incident with a feeling of power; her confidence that she will be able to mould Arthur into what she considers a better man amounts to spiritual arrogance. She is, however, headed for ruin at the hands of her husband, a disaster precipitated by her own folly. Helen has completely accepted the Victorian model for the wife – the angel in the house – and has set herself up to fail. She views it as her duty to reform Arthur's corrupt and self-serving nature, and is determined to take the fallen man and lift him to salvation through her influence; he, in turn, is "totally dependent on Helen's disapproval – combined, paradoxically, with her complete subservience to him" (Jacobs 210). It is this combination that proves to be devastating for them both. When she extracts a promise from Arthur that he will change and gives him her forgiveness, Arthur is assured of his freedom to behave in any way that he sees fit. He is accustomed to living a life without personal consequences or conviction and is now assured that this kind of life will continue because it will give him Helen's undivided attention and long-suffering love.

This section has been criticized as a mistake in Anne Brontë's psychological portrayal of her characters. P.J.M. Scott calls it "an artistic weakness [because] it hardly seems plausible that Huntingdon would confess so much of his bad past to the rich fiancée he wants, no less for herself than her money, at a time so dangerous to his security" (85). This analysis is not uncommon; however, I believe it to be flawed. The critic takes something away from Anne by questioning the logic and negating the importance of this section to the novel. Arthur is able to tell Helen this story in complete security because he is aware that she is susceptible to his influence. Even with a slightly less cynical approach, the narrative works when viewed as a test by Arthur to see how much his future wife can handle and what her reaction will be. If Arthur had delivered this narrative after they were married, its effect would have been considerably diminished. The fact that the narrative occurs before the marriage sets up the "angel versus devil motif to call attention to what becomes a kind of pitched battle of souls" (Berry 75). From another point of view, "the rumours of [Arthur's] 'wildness' and dissipation secretly fascinate the serious, conventionally brought-up girl, adding spice to the charm and a challenge to her innate goodness and feminine desire to be wanted, to be of service for good" (Bell 95). Helen's acceptance of Arthur is partly a result of her attraction to a challenge, allured by the man who no one believes is good enough for her. She is charmed and gives into the temptations that Arthur places before her.

The timing of this narrative demonstrates the original purpose for which Helen wrote these experiences in a journal – she wished to remember the beginning of her relationship with Arthur in hopes of comparing the man she reformed with the debauchee of the narrative. Ultimately, the journal becomes much more than a personal record of Helen's feelings and thoughts; it becomes the centre of a novel that is "the record of a private text entering the public, novelistic domain" (Gordon 731). The diary is a mode of self-defense for Helen; however, instead of a record of her success, it is a chronicle of her failure.

Anne Brontë presents a balanced view of Helen and Arthur's story, and although Helen marries for love in the end, she is held accountable for her choices and must live with the emotional and spiritual damage that Arthur has inflicted, not just on herself but on their son. Young Arthur is potentially the greatest triumph for Arthur because his name, face, and influence serve as constant reminders of the choices that Helen made to put herself in this situation.

Helen's most assertive act in the novel is to leave her husband when she feels that he is a lost cause and that her son is falling under the negative influence of his father. The final embedded narrative in Helen's diary (and of the novel) is given by Walter Hargrave. His narrative has an impact in that Helen decides to take action as a result of what she hears. Hargrave tells Helen of Arthur's behaviour during the previous evening's gathering of his friends. In her absence, Arthur announced, "I have no wife . . . or if I have . . . I value her so highly that any one among you, that can fancy her, may have her and welcome . . . and my blessing into the bargain!" (3.39.340). Hargrave appears to be reporting to Helen out of concern; however, he has a personal agenda in that he is attracted to her and is trying to convince her to leave her husband and to begin a sexual relationship with him. Despite the underlying motive, this account solidifies Arthur's downward progression into depravity. There is some question as to Helen's wisdom in accepting Hargrave's words as the truth because his motive is suspect; however, she trusts him enough to reveal her plan to leave Arthur. She finally decides to stop *re*acting to Arthur's antagonistic and cruel behaviour and take a *pro*active approach. When Hargrave's intentions are revealed, Helen is quick to repel his advance. It is clear that Hargrave had only one motive in telling Helen about what he witnessed – he wants her in return: "I must not be denied! . . . God has designed me to be your comfort and protector – I feel it – I know it as certainly as if a voice from Heaven declared 'Ye twain shall be one flesh' – and you spurn me from you" (342). Helen has, however, learned to handle herself and does not allow Hargrave's words to deter her from her plan to escape. This episode demonstrates that Helen has learned from her mistakes and is strong enough to put her plan into action.

The conclusion of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is, perhaps, its most vulnerable point. Because the corrupt Arthur dies and the long-suffering Helen is given control over her own destiny, critics tend to label the novel as a cautionary tale; however, to limit the scope of this novel to a lesson in morality is to oversimplify and demean the author's skill as an artist. Although conclusions about the dangers of excess and the position of women in society can be drawn from the novel, Anne does not force a moral on her readers; rather, it is there for the taking, for those who feel the necessity for a moral, but it is a secondary feature of her writing: "Anne was aiming, not at morality, but reality, and she succeeded magnificently" (Bell 132). The tendency to label *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as didactic stems from the assumption that Anne was writing about her brother, Branwell; although he may be the source of much of her material for the realistic scenes of debauchery and disharmony, it is wrong to define the novel based on this information. Just as this type of assumption destroys the artistry of *Agnes Grey*, so too it detracts from the greatness of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* The embedded narratives of these novels bring the characters to life by demonstrating the dynamics between them and creating a realistic psychological dimension in the novels. As Elizabeth Langland eloquently states: "In stirring up the mud of Victorian society, Brontë produces the treasure of her novel" (136), a treasure that relatively few have unearthed.

Chapter Two
Emily Brontë: The Many Voices of *Wuthering Heights*

In over 150 years of critical study of and debate over *Wuthering Heights* (1847), only one certainty exists: Emily Brontë's only novel is a compelling puzzle to which there is no simple, or maybe any, solution, and the elusiveness of a satisfactory answer is what makes it so compelling, even irresistible, to all that encounter its power: "The literature on *Wuthering Heights* is abundant and its incoherence striking. Even more than some other great works of literature, this novel seems to have an inexhaustible power to call forth commentary and more commentary" (Miller 374).[1] It is the aim of this chapter to open a space in the crowded critical territory by presenting the embedded narratives[2] of the novel as focal points for a discussion of Emily's narrative approach, examining their effects on the structure, character, plot, and themes through the elements of tone, language, and motive. The embedded narratives are a part of the foundation on which the novel is built in that they hold key insights into the development of character, plot, and themes and show the development that takes place as the story progresses through the many voices that narrate.

Emily uses the embedded narrative to startling effect. *Wuthering Heights* is filled with stripped-down, highly evocative images and language that reveal specific details, thoughts, emotions, and actions through the conveyed experiences of the narrators.

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[1] From the time of its publication in 1847, Emily Brontë's novel has been the subject of wide-ranging critical debate. From denunciation on the basis of its "coarse morality" and a perceived lack of control in the more formal aspects of writing, to the highest forms of praise and declarations of Emily's genius, and everything in between, there seems to be only one area of consensus among critics and readers – there is no one interpretation that adequately explains *Wuthering Heights*.

[2] Although there have been many critics who have discussed the narrative technique of the novel, there does not seem to be an in-depth analysis of the purpose for and implications of the embedded narratives. In addition to these narratives being generally overlooked, the critics who do touch on them tend to look at only a few of them, leaving others without notice.

Nested within the narratives of Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean, the embedded narratives of Catherine I,[3] Heathcliff, Isabella Linton/Heathcliff, Catherine II, and Linton Heathcliff provide alternative perspectives to those of the primary narrators; Zillah's narrative is a plot device used to fill in the missing details of the story.

The power of these narratives lies in their placement in the text, the tone, language, and motive of the speaker in telling his or her story, and the form in which it is told (oral or written). With the exception of Catherine I's written narrative at the beginning of the novel, which is read by Lockwood, Nelly Dean is the interlocutor of all the embedded narratives; she is the one in whom all the subsidiary narrators place their trust. Narrative convention accounts in part for her presence as listener/reader of these stories because she is the one that is relating them to Lockwood, but each narrator chooses Nelly for his or her own specific reason. Nelly is a unique interlocutor in that none of the events being described directly affect her; she seeks information and uses what she hears to tell this story to Mr. Lockwood.

Unlike the narratives in Anne Brontë's novels that focus on the underlying motives of the speakers and the effect that their words have upon their listener, the emphasis in the narratives of *Wuthering Heights* is on the inner truths that characters reveal about themselves through their description of events and the personal implications of those truths. Through the skilled story-telling of Emily Brontë, the reader is pulled into the world of the novel and "drawn . . . toward the story" (Harpham 90) of each of these characters.

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[3] For the sake of clarity, I refer to Catherine Earnshaw Linton as Catherine I, and to her daughter as Catherine II.

The first embedded narrative of the novel is Catherine I's written account of a Sunday afternoon at Wuthering Heights and the treatment that she and Heathcliff receive that precipitates their rebellion against Hindley Earnshaw. Mr. Lockwood discovers this "pen-and-ink commentary," written in the margins of the books that he finds in the strange bed in Catherine's old room. Her unique diary is a record of her thoughts and feelings, written around the edges of the text: "Some were detached sentences; other parts took the form of a regular diary, scrawled in an unformed, childish hand" (1.3.18). This narrative is our introduction to Catherine and to the past that haunts Wuthering Heights. She is marginalized by her brother's treatment of her, and her writing is an expression of the position that she holds in her home after her father dies.

This narrative provides a bleak picture of life at Wuthering Heights. Catherine and Heathcliff are routinely subjected to the religious ravings of Joseph and, on this particular occasion, they are forced to listen to him in a cold room while Hindley and his wife "basked downstairs before a comfortable fire – doing anything but reading their Bibles" (18). Immediately, Catherine makes a distinction between herself and Heathcliff on one side and Hindley and Frances on the other. Catherine's language conveys her feelings and the effect that Hindley's actions have on her and Heathcliff. In the first sentence, she uses the words "awful," "detestable," and "atrocious" to describe her situation. She also "wishes" that her "father were back again," and reveals that she and Heathcliff have taken "our initiatory step" (18) toward a rebellion, indicating her unhappiness and unwillingness to accept the status quo. Catherine uses the contrast between her experience with Joseph and the behaviour of her brother to present the worst possible picture of life at the Heights. Catherine and Heathcliff are "commanded" to participate in a religious lesson, "groaning and shivering" (18) for three hours; and Hindley, calling himself "master," and called "the tyrant" by Catherine, threatens them when they come down the stairs: "I'll demolish the first who puts me out of temper! I insist on perfect sobriety and silence" (19). Hindley's wife – the silent partner in his abuse – is quick to pull Heathcliff's hair "heartily" at Hindley's request. They live in comfort, "like two babies" in their "paradise on the hearth" (19), in contrast to the life that Catherine and Heathcliff are forced to live. From Catherine's first words in the novel, there is a division set up between the world that her family inhabits and the world in which Heathcliff exists. By choosing to have a relationship with this outsider, Catherine places herself in his world and suffers ill treatment as a result.

Cathy writes that she and Heathcliff fling their books into the fire in defiance of Hindley, demonstrating their solidarity and readiness to defy the rules. As a result, they are thrown into the kitchen to await punishment and Catherine begins her written account. The fact that she writes in the midst of her own reaction gives a clear picture of how Hindley's oppressive presence affects her, in the immediacy of the moment: "The spirit of rebellion she reports seems still in the air, still vibrant as Catherine is for Heathcliff even after her death" (Vogler 84). By writing in the margins of her book, Catherine expresses her frustration with her situation, her anger with her brother, and her identification with Heathcliff as a marginalized individual.

As one of the novel's two focal characters, Heathcliff commands much of the reader's attention. His two embedded narratives are memorable in their revelation of his character and his particular perspective on four pivotal events in the novel: Catherine's stay at Thrushcross Grange after her initial separation from Heathcliff, Heathcliff's two visits to Catherine's grave, and his confrontation of Isabella and Hindley at Wuthering Heights. He is different from the other subsidiary narrators in that he does not speak to Nelly in order to create sympathy or to impose his perspective on her; he tells his stories to convey his own feelings and to articulate his frustration with the realities of his life and does not seem to consider the impact of his words.

It is the deep connection between them that makes Catherine's change after being at Thrushcross Grange so devastating for Heathcliff. In one of the most vivid moments of the novel, Heathcliff breathlessly tells Nelly Dean about his and Catherine's experience at the Grange. The reader is brought into the heart of the novel through Heathcliff's narrative in that his description of his and Cathy's view of the Grange and their subsequent separation foreshadows the drama of their relationship and the contrast between the two worlds of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange that are central to the novel. T.E. Apter describes the "success of the Catherine/Heathcliff theme" as dependent upon the "felt potency of their love" (213). This statement holds truth because it is precisely the intensity of the emotion between Heathcliff and Catherine that generates much of the energy in the novel, so much that the second generation of characters is often overlooked by readers and critics.

In Heathcliff's first narrative, the power of the connection between him and Catherine is at once demonstrated and threatened, revealing the conflict that is inherent in their relationship. As they mutually agree to leave the Heights to run on the moors, away from the house in which Hindley rules, they seem totally immersed in their own world, united in their desire for freedom and in their absorption in each other. In this instance, he tells Nelly of his and Catherine's experience at the Grange because she is the only person left at Wuthering Heights that he can trust (however misplaced that trust may be). Heathcliff's story is filled with description and detail, making his account vivid; however, he is marginalized to such an extent by the Linton family that he accounts for their words and actions but talks only generally about his own speech. He is more an observer than a participant after he and Catherine are discovered at Thrushcross Grange.

Heathcliff's language and tone change throughout his narrative. He begins by telling of his and Catherine's desire for freedom and the curiosity that lured them to the Grange. The beginning of his account is filled with references to himself and Catherine as "we" and "Cathy and I," and to their mutual participation in and enjoyment of their adventure:

> Cathy and I escaped from the wash-house to have a ramble at liberty, and getting a glimpse of the Grange lights, we thought we would just go and see whether the Lintons passed their Sunday evenings standing shivering in corners, while their father and mother sat eating and drinking, and singing and laughing, and burning their eyes out before the fire. (1.6.45-46)

In addition to the sense that Catherine and Heathcliff are in complete harmony in their desire for freedom, Heathcliff also conveys the bitterness with which they view their circumstances, and their curiosity about the way other children their age live. When Heathcliff describes what he and Catherine see, peering through the window of the Grange, there is at first a sense of their amazement at the finery inside the house; however, this attitude quickly changes from envy to scorn when they observe "the idiots" (Edgar and

Isabella Linton) fighting over a dog. At this point, they are on the outside looking into a world that seems far from their own.

Heathcliff's references to himself and Catherine as "we" change when they are discovered and Catherine is caught by the dog on the Linton property. At that instant, he begins to refer to himself and Cathy separately, using "I" and "she." In their encounter with the Lintons, Heathcliff describes the distinction made between himself and Catherine, based solely on their appearance and then on the fact that she is an Earnshaw and he is "that strange acquisition my late neighbour made in his journey to Liverpool" (48). Cathy is called "a little girl" and "Miss Earnshaw," while Heathcliff is referred to (as if he is not there) as "an out-and-outer" (47), a "foul-mouthed thief," "the villain," a "frightful thing . . . exactly like the son of a fortune teller," "a gypsy" (48), and "a wicked boy . . . and quite unfit for a decent house" (49). Heathcliff is marginalized initially by the Linton's characterizations of him, and subsequently by their ignoring him and attending to Catherine: "She was a young lady and they made a distinction between her treatment and mine" (49).

Heathcliff reports that Catherine spoke only once during this narrative when she yells for him to keep running after she is bitten by the dog. This moment is the last time that Catherine is a part of Heathcliff's sphere. As the Lintons take her inside to care for her wounds, the "grey cloak of the dairy maid" (49) is removed and her equality with Heathcliff along with it.

At the end of his narrative, Heathcliff describes himself observing Catherine from a distance. She forgets him in all of the attention that she receives; however, Heathcliff is not upset with her. He speaks highly of her, admiring her in contrast to the

Lintons: "I left her, as merry as she could be . . . and kindling a spark of spirit in the vacant blue eyes of the Lintons – a dim reflection from her own enchanting face – I saw they were full of stupid admiration; she is so immeasurably superior to them – to everybody on earth" (49). Even though he has been treated badly, Heathcliff does not seem to be angry; rather, he mocks the Lintons, and their distinction between him and Cathy does not seem to matter. Heathcliff expresses his disdain for the Lintons and their way of life, believing that he and Catherine's relationship is more desirable than material wealth: "I'd not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here, for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange – not if I might have the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley's blood" (47). Heathcliff understands the chasm that exists between his life at the Heights and that of the Lintons at the Grange, and there is a violent rage in his desire for revenge; there is also an irony to his statement in that when Catherine marries Edgar, Heathcliff's only wish is to be in Edgar's place as Catherine's husband.

Despite her apparent abandonment of him in the midst of this experience, Heathcliff does not fear a prolonged separation from Catherine at this point. He believes that she will return to him and that all will be as it was before. His admiration, even worship, of Catherine is obvious, and he does not yet feel the sting of the divide that exists between them; it is, however, apparent that Heathcliff truly becomes an outsider as he stands, alone, looking at Cathy and the Lintons through the window. The process of their total separation has begun: They have "experience[d] a disruption of their united being that ultimately sets them on the path to spirit possession" (Dickerson 72).

In his second narrative, Heathcliff tells Nelly of his visit to Catherine's grave and the incident with Isabella and Hindley that follows. Heathcliff is fixated on Catherine and on his revenge on those who have kept them apart. His tone is more serious and his language more mature; he speaks in smoother phrases, uses more complex words, and draws on metaphor to express his physical and emotional condition. There is also an element of the supernatural, as Catherine has died and he seeks to arrange their physical reunion after his own death. This narrative functions in three ways: (1) It reveals Heathcliff's anticipation of his reunion with Catherine in death; (2) It further illuminates the night of violence at the Heights which has already been described by Isabella; (3) It brings the story full circle, accounting for the circumstances that Lockwood encounters at the beginning of the novel.

Heathcliff's narrative provides insight into the workings of his mind; specifically, it demonstrates the obsession with Catherine that has governed his existence and confirms her continuing and profound influence on his life: "[He] is a man haunted by a ghost of happiness for which he must exorcise his soul, a soul filled with accumulated hatred" (Watson 154). The fact that Heathcliff remains focused on Catherine eighteen years beyond her death "validates his unalterable commitment" (Anderson 128) and demonstrates the power of his love and the hate that accompanies it.

Heathcliff's pain is the central theme of his narrative and he blames Catherine for the condition in which he exists. This narrative is concerned with Heathcliff alone – he is single-minded in his focus on himself and his life after the death of Catherine. There is a boldness in his words as he boasts of his morbid behaviour at Catherine's grave the day of Linton's death when he convinces "the sexton, who was digging Linton's grave, to remove the earth off her coffin lid" so that he can see her (2.15.288). Heathcliff does not explain why the sexton complied with this request, but it seems unlikely that he would do such a thing without feeling pressure from a somewhat depraved Heathcliff. His altered mental state is further demonstrated by his arrangement to have Catherine's casket opened on the side to facilitate his own burial beside her body when he dies. There is a sense of the impending relief of his suffering in this act, and an obsessive hatred of Edgar in his desire to keep him physically from his wife after burial: "by the time Linton gets to us, he'll not know which is which" (288). Heathcliff's desire for revenge is so complete that he must insure that there is a physical barrier between Edgar and his wife after death as there was between himself and Catherine in life.

Nelly interrupts Heathcliff, calling him "very wicked" and asking if he was "not ashamed to disturb the dead?" (289). Although Heathcliff responds to her question, he does not really acknowledge Nelly's presence; he seems to be unaware of anything but his own feelings. He responds with anger to Nelly's comment, but he does not direct it at her; rather, his rage toward Catherine flows over: "Disturbed her? No! she has disturbed me, night and day, through eighteen years – incessantly – remorselessly" (289). Although he is angry with Catherine, the only relief for his condition will be a reunion with her in the afterlife, demonstrating the love/hate nature of their relationship: "I was tranquil. I dreamt I was sleeping the last sleep, by that sleeper, with my heart stopped, and my cheek frozen against hers" (289). This reunion has become Heathcliff's hope for the future and has taken on a religious tone, as well as adding a supernatural element to the story.

In the second part of his narrative, Heathcliff describes his first visit to Catherine's grave, on the day she was buried. He takes Nelly back to this day because his present "tranquility" stands in contrast to his condition immediately after Catherine's death: "I was wild after she died, and eternally, from dawn to dawn, praying her to return to me – her spirit – I have a strong faith in ghosts; I have a conviction that they can, and do exist, among us!" (289). This mention of the supernatural demonstrates the change in focus for Heathcliff from the temporal to the spiritual world. He illustrates his belief in Catherine's existence beyond death in the way he senses her presence as he digs at her grave: "as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there, not under me, but on the earth" (290). Although he is still fixated on revenge, Heathcliff has turned his eyes toward the world that Catherine now inhabits, and he feels their connection so strongly that he can feel her presence.

Heathcliff describes a sense of elation after digging in Cathy's grave. He is convinced that she is "on the earth" (290), and is so consumed by this notion that he glances over his confrontation with Isabella and Hindley when he returns to the Heights: "I remember, that accursed Earnshaw and my wife opposed my entrance. I remember stopping to kick the breath out of him, and then hurrying upstairs, to my room" (290). In Isabella's account of this event, which will be addressed later in this chapter, she describes at length the details of their encounter; however, it seems to have held more importance for her than for Heathcliff. He is fixated on Catherine and has an utter disregard for those around him. It is his feelings after he rushes upstairs that Heathcliff remembers most vividly, and the contradiction of his relationship with Catherine is again allowed to surface: He calls her a "devil" and "infernal," and feels that he is the "sport of . . . intolerable torture" (290). He goes on to describe the nature of his existence since Catherine's death, living to be haunted by her to the point that he suffers sleep deprivation and constant emotional upheaval. He blames Catherine for this condition and accuses her of killing him slowly: "It was a strange way of killing, not by inches, but by fractions of hair-breadths, to beguile me with the spectre of hope, through eighteen years!" (291). Heathcliff is "suicidally caught in Catherine's need for him not to forget" (Davies 163). It is Heathcliff's suffering and the way he responds to it that keeps Catherine in the here and now, providing her with a measure of immortality until his own death. Although he is focused on his revenge on those that have wronged him and who have kept him from Catherine, his desire for vengeance is irrelevant in comparison to his need to be with her.

Despite his fixation on Catherine, Heathcliff remains focused on his plan to make the Earnshaws and Lintons suffer. In marrying Isabella Linton, he exacts a measure of revenge on Edgar, setting in motion a series of events that creates chaos for the Linton family. Isabella has two narratives in the novel: She writes a letter and delivers a spoken narrative to Nelly Dean that tell of her experiences as the wife of Heathcliff. It is through these narratives that Isabella becomes more than just a convention; she evolves into a three-dimensional character through her own words. Although she meets with an early death, Isabella is not another Frances Earnshaw, who fulfills her duty as a wife and female character by giving birth to a son and then dying. By seizing hold of two extended sections of the narrative, Isabella asserts her identity and makes a strong case against Heathcliff. The first narrative is written the day after Isabella arrives at Wuthering Heights and reveals the shock that she experiences in an environment that is so different from her home at Thrushcross Grange. The second narrative is an account of the acceleration of events that leads to her escape from Wuthering Heights and gives her perspective on the confrontation between her, Hindley, and Heathcliff after Catherine dies.

Isabella's letter to Nelly is a cry for help, but she is not direct in her plea. Knowing that she has made a mistake and that her brother is angry with her, Isabella writes to Nelly, fully aware that she cannot keep a secret. She mentions Edgar and Catherine several times in her letter, exhorting Nelly to keep her suffering from her family, but asking her to "inform Edgar that I'd give the world to see his face again – that my heart returned to Thrushcross Grange in twenty-four hours after I left it, and is there at this moment, full of warm feelings for him, and Catherine!" (1.13.136). Isabella underlines the next phrase: "*I can't follow it, though* . . . they need not expect me, and they may draw what conclusions they please; taking care, however, to lay nothing at the door of my weak will, or deficient affection" (136). Isabella's choice of words suggests to Nelly that she needs her help in "following" her message to Edgar and Catherine. She also attaches the idea that she is not at fault for her situation, pointing the responsibility at someone else; she feels that Heathcliff is to blame and attempts to direct the anger of her family toward him through her letter. Isabella must be careful in building her case against Heathcliff because of Catherine's attachment to him and her ability to influence Edgar. Isabella is also aware that Nelly has been involved with Heathcliff and the Earnshaws in the past and must develop her argument in order to create sympathy for herself and present the worst possible image of Heathcliff.

Isabella poses several questions to Nelly at the beginning of her letter: "How did you contrive to preserve the common sympathies of human nature when you resided here? . . . Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (136). These questions point to the focus of her narrative – her responses to her new environment and her realization that Heathcliff is using her to revenge himself on Edgar. Her letter contains only her first night of experiences at the Heights – a fact that seems surprising given the depth of her disillusionment with her new life. Again, she points to Heathcliff as the source of her misery by dismissing her physical discomfort: "It is to amuse myself that I dwell on such subjects as the lack of external comforts; they never occupy my thoughts, except at the moment when I miss them – I should laugh and dance for joy, if I found their absence was the total of my miseries, and the rest was an unnatural dream!" (136-37). Isabella uses images of the "unnatural" to describe her experience as Mrs. Heathcliff, conveying her feelings of desperation and alienation in her new sphere of existence.

There are several references to locked doors in this narrative, demonstrating Isabella's realization of her mistake and that she is a prisoner of her husband. The gate is locked behind her when she enters the property, "as if we lived in an ancient castle" (137), and Hindley "ordered" her into the house and "shut and refastened the door" (139). Joseph reveals that Heathcliff "allas keeps [his bedroom door] locked" (143). He wishes to keep everyone out of his room, and Hindley is fixated on this point, telling Isabella that he "cannot resist going up with [his weapon], every night, and trying his door. If once I find it open, he's done for!" (140). The locks create an environment of confinement in the house, keeping prisoners inside and placing barriers between individuals.

The most common references in Isabella's narrative are to Edgar and Catherine and life at the Grange. She refers to the state of Catherine's health and to the breach that exists between herself and her brother, and expresses regret and her wish to see them and her home again. Isabella repeats her initial request that Nelly keep her suffering from her family twice more in her narrative, in the middle and at the end: "mind you don't tell Edgar, or Catherine" (139), and "Beware of uttering one breath of this to any one at the Grange" (145). She responds immediately to the image of Catherine in Hareton and Hindley Earnshaw, both of whom disappoint and frighten her. Hareton threatens her, and Hindley, whom Isabella describes as being "on the verge of madness" (141), bombards her with his obsession with murdering Heathcliff. In failing to find a connection with Catherine's relations, Isabella thinks about her home while being forced to prepare her own dinner: "I went briskly to work, sighing to remember a period when it would have been all merry fun; but compelled speedily to drive off the remembrance. It racked me to recall past happiness" (141). Having performed what is undoubtedly her first domestic task, Isabella tries to bring a touch of politeness to the supper in wanting Hareton to "have his [milk] in a mug" (142), instead of drinking out of the pitcher; however, her manners are not compatible with her new environment and Joseph is "vastly offended at this nicety" (142).

Accepting her failure, Isabella looks for a "parlour" and then for a room in which to eat her supper and go to sleep. This, too, is a futile exercise, and she finally breaks down: "I was so vexed, I flung my tray and its contents on the ground; and then seated myself at the stairs-head, hid my face in my hands, and cried" (144). In this, her most desperate moment, Isabella takes on Catherine-like behaviour in order to cope, and Joseph reacts strongly: "Weel done, Miss Cathy! weel done, Miss Cathy!" (144). He invokes Cathy for two reasons: Isabella's behaviour recalls that of Catherine as a child, a scene to which he would often have been privy, and it is Catherine's choices that have created the circumstances under which Heathcliff has taken Isabella as his wife. The invocation of Catherine's name emphasizes that it is Isabella's association with this family that has produced her current circumstances and it is Catherine who she hopes can offer her some help.

When her efforts to reach out for human connection and to make herself somewhat at home fail, Isabella realizes that she must adapt to fit her situation. Following her breakdown on the stairs, she sits in the dark and is "compelled . . . to admit the necessity of smothering my pride, and choking my wrath, and bestirring myself to remove its effects" (144) in order to survive. She is roused from this state by Throttler, "a son of our old Skulker," and a symbol of the necessity of adaptation to life at Wuthering Heights (the dog was born at Thrushcross Grange). She pulls herself together and "st[eals] into the nearest doorway" (145) when Hindley passes by. She has learned to avoid contact and, therefore, conflict, and falls asleep in a chair without further incident.

Isabella awakes from a "deep and sweet" sleep to have her first encounter with her husband at Wuthering Heights, and she prepares Nelly for this exchange with references to Heathcliff: "above every sorrow beside, this rose pre-eminent - despair at finding nobody who could or would be my ally against Heathcliff" (139). She responds to Hindley's weapon with "a hideous notion . . . How powerful I should be possessing such an instrument!" (140). It is with these thoughts in mind that Isabella greets her husband in the morning. Her language has changed and she makes a sarcastic characterization of his manner as "loving." Isabella tells Nelly that Heathcliff "told me of Catherine's illness, and accused my brother of causing it; promising that I should be Edgar's proxy in suffering, till he could get a hold of him" (145). Isabella reiterates her feelings in her conclusion: "I do hate him – I am wretched – I have been a fool!" (145). In the course of this narrative, Isabella is transformed from a naïve, romantically deluded girl into a desperate woman crafting a cry for help in order to elicit the strongest possible response from Thrushcross Grange. She places her hope in Nelly, believing that she will find a way to have her family help without having to ask for it directly, and with the belief that she can survive on her own until she can escape.

The help that she so desperately needs does not arrive and Isabella's second narrative demonstrates the effect that living at Wuthering Heights has on her. In Heathcliff's prison, Isabella undergoes a startling change. She quickly develops the survival skills needed in order to live as Mrs. Heathcliff, and her language and tone convey the horror and desperation that precipitate her transformation. Her mind-set has completely changed since living at Thrushcross Grange to accommodate to life at Wuthering Heights. The change has been forced upon her by her own choices and the absence of aid from her family; Isabella realizes that she cannot rely on anyone for help and finally becomes proactive, a decision that results in her escape from Wuthering Heights.

Isabella chooses Nelly as her interlocutor; however, this time it is because Nelly happens to be present when she arrives at the Grange on the night of her escape. Isabella takes this opportunity, however unplanned, to deliver her version of events. In doing this, Isabella makes certain that at least one person will know what she has been through, and it allows her to express her feelings. There is also the issue of continuity: Isabella wrote her initial story to Nelly and so she is able to pick up where she left off and her words have a stronger impact in the context of the letter. There is a shift in Isabella's motive in this narrative in that she is not attempting to convince anyone of her suffering; rather, her emotions flow in the aftermath of what has happened, without the purposeful construction or delivery of the letter.

Isabella's alteration is apparent in the force of her language. Her delivery is emotionally raw, dripping with fresh blood that represents the physical and emotional wounds she has suffered. She has completely changed from the naïve, pampered girl that eloped with Heathcliff. During their short "courtship," Isabella defended Heathcliff on the basis of her belief in his innate goodness: "Mr. Heathcliff is not a fiend; he has an honourable soul, and a true one" (1.10.103). When Nelly attempts to convince Isabella of Heathcliff's unsuitability as a lover, Isabella's romantic notions repel her words: "I'll not listen to your slanders. What malevolence you must have to wish to convince me that there is no happiness in the world!" (104). Although she becomes angry with Catherine when she teases her about Heathcliff, Isabella does not display the strength and ruthlessness that she does when she is pushed to the brink of madness as Heathcliff's wife. In response to Catherine's teasing, Isabella politely addresses her and Heathcliff: "I'd thank you to adhere to the truth and not slander me, even in joke! Mr. Heathcliff, be kind enough to bid this friend of yours release me – she forgets that you and I are not intimate acquaintances, and what amuses her is painful to me beyond expression" (105).

As in her previous narrative, Isabella invokes Catherine and Edgar's names, but there is a different tone in her references. She does not want to see Catherine's baby because she represents only sadness: "put poor Catherine's baby away – I don't like to see it!" (2.3.170). Isabella also rejects the possibility of remaining with her brother: "Edgar has not been kind, has he? And I won't come suing for his assistance; nor will I bring him into more trouble" (171). Instead of looking for help, Isabella is making a break with her past, with Heathcliff and with her family, in order to escape. She is also aware that Heathcliff will not allow her to remain at Thrushcross Grange: "Do you think he could bear to see me grow fat and merry; and could bear to think that we were tranquil, and not resolve on poisoning our comfort?" (171). There is a pragmatism to Isabella's thinking at this point:

> I have the satisfaction of being sure that he detests me to the point of its annoying him seriously to have me within ear-shot, or eye-sight – I notice, when I enter his presence, the muscles of his countenance are involuntarily distorted into an expression of hatred . . . It is strong enough to make me feel pretty certain that he would not chase me over England, supposing I contrived a clear escape; and therefore I must get quite away. (171-72)

Although she is assured of Heathcliff's aversion to her, there remains a hint of emotional confusion on Isabella's part. Her rationality remains at war with her romanticism as she continues to struggle with her feelings for Heathcliff: "I can recollect yet how I loved him; and can dimly imagine that I could still be loving him, if – No, no! Even if he had doted on me, the devilish nature would have revealed its existence, somehow" (172). Although she says she would like to see Heathcliff dead, her narrative includes her refusal to help Hindley in his plan to murder him. She clearly struggles with her feelings and wonders at Catherine's "awfully perverted taste," wishing that her "Monster" of a husband "could be blotted out of creation, and out of my memory!" (271). If Heathcliff were "blotted out," Isabella could forget her own role in creating her situation: "I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death; and flung it back to me – people feel with their hearts, Ellen, and since he has destroyed mine, I have not power to feel for him, and I would not, though he groaned from this to his dying day, and wept tears of blood for Catherine!" (171). Her heart and romantic notions broken in pieces, Isabella begins to cry, but "immediately dashing the water from her eyes, she recommenced" (172), revealing the conflict that continues to rage within her.

Isabella's transformation is reflected in her choice of descriptive language. She characterizes Heathcliff as "the brute beast" (170), "that incarnate goblin" (171), "the tyrant" (177), "the ruffian" (177), and "diabolical" (179). Sparing no detail, Isabella describes the events that lead up to her escape, creating a picture of violence, rage, and hatred, beginning with a preface that summarizes her experience:

> You asked, what has driven me to flight at last? I was compelled to attempt it, because I had succeeded in rousing his rage a pitch above his malignity. Pulling out the nerves with red hot pincers requires more coolness than knocking on the head. He was worked up to forget the fiendish prudence he boasted of, and proceeding to murderous violence. (172)

Isabella is no longer the weak, suffering girl of her letter; she has become Mrs. Heathcliff and is capable of doing anything that is necessary to survive. She re-accounts the events leading to her escape after the death of Catherine: Heathcliff's behaviour changes, but Isabella has no compassion and mocks how he grieves by locking himself in his room: "There he has continued, praying like a methodist; only the deity he implored is senseless dust and ashes . . . After concluding these precious orisons – and they lasted generally till he grew hoarse, and his voice was strangled in his throat – he would be off again" (173). Isabella's perceptions are so convoluted that she views things in a strange way: "For me, grieved as I was about Catherine, it was impossible to avoid regarding this season of deliverance from degrading oppression as a holiday" (173). She is no longer shocked by what she sees, but she remains affected by Joseph's "eternal lectures" and describes him and Hareton as "detestable" (173), leaving the "sullen and depressed" Hindley as her only companion.

It is her association with Hindley that brings Isabella to the most critical decision of her life. She describes a particular day after Catherine's death on which "it seemed as if all joy had vanished from the world, never to be restored" (174). When Hindley decides to lock Heathcliff out of the house, Isabella seems to have found an ally: "he then came and brought his chair to the other side of my table, leaning over it and searching in my eyes a sympathy with the burning hate that gleamed from his: as he both looked and felt like an assassin, he couldn't exactly find that; but he discovered enough to encourage him to speak" (174). Isabella resists any temptation that Hindley presents, remaining pragmatic in her consideration of her actions: "I'd be glad of a retaliation that wouldn't recoil on myself; but treachery and violence are spears pointed at both ends – they wound those who resort to them, worse than their enemies" (174-75). Isabella backs up her words with action in her refusal to remain silent and allow Hindley to murder Heathcliff. She does, however, admit that it would be "a blessing" for Hindley "should Heathcliff put him out of misery" and "a blessing" for herself "should he send Heathcliff to his right abode" (176). She then demonstrates her continuing conflict of feeling by mocking Heathcliff as she protects him from the waiting Hindley: "Heathcliff, if I were you, I'd go stretch myself over her grave, and die like a faithful dog . . . The world is surely not worth living in now, is it? You had distinctly impressed on me the idea that Catherine was the whole joy of your life – I can't imagine how you think of surviving her loss" (176). In this barrage of words, Isabella attempts to wound Heathcliff more deeply than the weapon that Hindley wields. Finally, Isabella's taunting causes the tension to accelerate into violence: Heathcliff beats Hindley savagely and turns on her. She demonstrates her relative desensitization to this kind of treatment by her behaviour the next morning: "Nothing hindered me from eating heartily; and I experienced a certain sense of satisfaction and superiority, as, at intervals, I cast a look towards my silent companions, and felt the comfort of a quiet conscience within me" (178). It is strange that Isabella would be so unaffected by what she has witnessed that she is able to ignore the "deadly sick" condition of Hindley and the "gaunt and ghastly" appearance of Heathcliff in the same room. She is pleased with her moral victory, having no part in the murder plot, and she is satisfied at having thrown her verbal barbs at Heathcliff.

It is in this strange moment that Isabella takes notice of the change that has come over her husband. Her fear seems to have disappeared and she sees in his face "an expression of unspeakable sadness" (179); however, she has no compassion and is "gratified" by his suffering: "ignoble as it seems to insult a fallen enemy, I couldn't miss this chance of sticking in a dart; his weakness was the only time when I could taste the delight of paying wrong for wrong" (179). It is an indication of Isabella's profound disillusionment and emotional damage that she views Heathcliff's suffering as an opportunity to assault him verbally; she makes a comment directed at Heathcliff's weakest spot – his love for Catherine. Her attack is three-pronged: She tells Hindley, within ear-shot of Heathcliff, that she remembers Catherine saying that "she stood between you and bodily harm . . . It's well people don't *really* rise from their grave, or, last night, she might have witnessed a repulsive scene!" (179). She then taunts Heathcliff with the image of a happy Catherine at the Grange "before he came" (180), and then, having produced tears in Heathcliff's eyes, she sticks the verbal dagger in his heart: "If poor Catherine had trusted you, and assumed the ridiculous, contemptible, degrading title of Mrs. Heathcliff, she would soon have presented a similar picture! *She* wouldn't have borne your abominable behaviour quietly; her detestation and disgust must have found voice" (181). By reversing her role with Catherine's, Isabella unknowingly points to Heathcliff's agony over Catherine's betrayal. He responds instinctively with violence, throwing a knife at her head: Isabella has learned "to use the power of language against Heathcliff, who resorts to the use of violence against Isabella" (Barreca 230). This is a strange moment, creating a oneness that has not before been present: "Isabella and Heathcliff are now united in hatred as they were never united in love" (McMaster 3). It is as if Isabella finally realizes the depth of her hatred, and, with the wound that she receives from the knife, she is empowered with the courage to flee. She leaves behind Heathcliff and Hindley "locked together on the hearth," and Hareton "hanging a litter of puppies from a chair-back" (181), two images that can only reinforce the necessity of her escape.

As she runs, Isabella experiences a sense of release and compares her flight to Thrushcross Grange to that of a "soul escaped from purgatory" (181). She is physically experiencing freedom for the first time in her life – freedom from Heathcliff and from the girl that she was: "I bounded, leaped, and flew . . . shot direct across the moor, rolling over banks, and wading through marshes" (181). She describes her physical liberation as the salvation of her soul, a religious experience, and without hesitation, states: "far rather would I be condemned to a perpetual dwelling in the infernal regions, than even for one night abide beneath the roof of Wuthering Heights again" (181). Although she adapts to survive, as a child of the Grange world, Isabella is emotionally, mentally, and physically incompatible with the world of Wuthering Heights. Forced to compromise herself to the point of endangering her soul, Isabella has sacrificed her emotional and physical safety, temporarily becoming a creature of the Heights, and she tells her story as a record of her strength. She cannot exist for a prolonged period of time in a sphere without restraint. Although she rebels against her upbringing by marrying Heathcliff, her curiosity about a different way of life and her attraction to what she perceives as a Romantic hero, leave her completely vulnerable, at the mercy of his hatred and desire for revenge. The scenes that she describes represent her capacity for cold, cruel behaviour and her willingness to do almost anything (short of murder) to escape her prison. However, she must face the consequences of her actions as she is now completely incompatible with her home at the Grange. She no longer fits into the world of restraint and finery both because she is tainted and because she has developed beyond her former life.

In criticism of *Wuthering Heights*, the second generation tends to be neglected; however, there are issues that arise from the existence of these characters, and both Catherine II and Linton Heathcliff deliver narratives that illuminate their function as products of the first generation. Catherine II's narrative describes her growing relationship with Linton, son of Heathcliff and Isabella. Her narrative distinguishes Cathy from her mother and solidifies her role in the Heathcliff revenge saga. Against her father's injunction, even because of it, Cathy ventures to Wuthering Heights and begins to exchange letters with Linton. It is only upon being caught that Cathy tells Nelly the story of her connection to her cousin, revealing her naiveté and the stubborn nature that she has inherited from her mother. The purpose of this narrative is to demonstrate the powerful draw of the world of Wuthering Heights to young Catherine. She has never experienced life outside the Grange and longs for a wider scope of experience and familial connection. She is pulled in by her desire to feel connected and by the seemingly peaceful environment that is presented to her by Heathcliff at Wuthering Heights. She and Linton are "brought warm wine and gingerbread" by a "good-natured" housekeeper while they sit by the fire and plan "where we would go, and what we would do in summer" (2.10.247). Cathy is also drawn to Linton because of his weak condition, playing with him "like a little girl playing with her baby doll" (McMaster 5). She is strong-willed, like her mother, and decides that Linton needs her help because of his weak physical condition. She is also eager to spend time with him because she has missed him from the day he was taken from the Grange. She is fulfilled by her role as Linton's nurse-maid/mother/friend/lover and "flying home light as air . . . dream[s] of Wuthering Heights and my sweet, darling cousin" (249).

Nelly is the interlocutor of this narrative; however, Cathy does not willingly choose to tell her story. Nelly forces Catherine to reveal her secret because she already suspects her of visiting Linton. She is somewhat devious in her coaxing of Cathy to confide in her, promising that "I would not scold, whatever her secret might be" (247). Nelly gives Cathy no choice; Nelly creates the advantage in extracting the information she seeks by confronting her by surprise and "petrify[ing[her an instant" (246). Once she is caught and accused, Catherine gives in and tells Nelly everything about her visits to Linton in the hope that her story will evoke a sympathetic response, and that Nelly will keep her secret from her father.

Cathy's revelation includes her arrangement with Michael, the stable man, to prepare her pony for the trip to Wuthering Heights. She is surprisingly manipulative in bribing Michael to participate, playing on his love of reading and his affection for her: "And then I negotiated with him about the pony . . . he offered, if I would lend him books out of the library, to do what I wished; but I preferred giving him my own, and that satisfied him better" (247). Cathy is fully aware of her disobedience, and has been warned by her father not to go to Wuthering Heights; however, she interprets Edgar's warnings as overprotectiveness and is intrigued by what lies at the house that she is forbidden to visit. Her own observation and experience tell her that there is nothing to fear and she revels in the challenge of raising the feeble Linton's spirits; however, there is much to fear and her naïve perceptions lead to disaster.

Cathy describes an incident in which she and Linton came "near quarrelling" during a discussion of what would be "the pleasantest manner of spending a hot July day" (248). The childish nature of their relationship is demonstrated in their petty debate about which is the "most perfect idea of heaven's happiness": For Linton, it is to "lie in an ecstasy of peace"; for Catherine, it is "to sparkle, and dance in a glorious jubilee" (248). In this argument lies a revelation of the essential differences between Cathy and Linton. Linton wishes only to be at rest because he is sickly and weak, and his wish for "an ecstasy of peace" reflects his unhappiness. Catherine is Linton's opposite: Her vision of heaven is a place where she can display her vibrant spirit and be with others in "a glorious jubilee." She dreams of a place filled with joy and the energy of a celebratory atmosphere. Their desires are shaped by their backgrounds: Linton wishes to be alone and at peace because of the chaotic house filled with sound and fury that his father has created at Wuthering Heights; standing in contrast is the world of restraint and finery in which Cathy lives at the Grange. Both of these environments are stifling for these young people, and although they feel happy to a certain extent in the only life that they have known, Cathy and Linton envision heaven as a place that is the opposite of where they live.

Catherine's naïveté is portrayed in this narrative in her misconceptions of Heathcliff and her treatment of Linton and Hareton. She does not understand the threat that Heathcliff poses to her, and ignoring the warnings she has received, seeks to prove her father wrong. She brings Heathcliff into her narrative to dissipate any concerns that Nelly may have (and may communicate to Edgar): "Mr. Heathcliff purposely avoids me. I have hardly seen him at all" (254). This avoidance, of course, is a part of Heathcliff's plan to lure Cathy into a relationship with his son. He plays his part convincingly, allowing her to reproach him for his treatment of Linton: "He burst into a laugh, and went away, saying that he was glad I took that view of the matter" (254). Like her aunt Isabella before her, Cathy is an unwitting part of Heathcliff's quest for vengeance, and he takes advantage of her innocence, ignorance, and rebellious nature. She is carefully pulled into the power struggle that began with her mother and will end only with Heathcliff's death.

Catherine shows her inability to see how living with Heathcliff has damaged both Hareton and Linton in her treatment of them. She fails to recognize, in either case, that Heathcliff's influence has created their problems. Her treatment of Linton and Hareton is based on her perceptions of them in relation to herself. Linton is very much like Cathy, in her judgment, because she knows that they are related and believes they have a special connection due to her memory of his stay at Thrushcross Grange. They also have similar backgrounds and education, having been raised by Isabella and Edgar respectively. As a result of her warm feelings toward and acceptance of Linton, Cathy treats him with kindness and friendship. She is also tolerant of his temper and sympathetic to his illness. She is enchanted by the idea that she can baby Linton and feels wanted because he is becoming dependent on her, singing "two or three pretty songs" (248) to him when he has a coughing fit. She tailors her manner to accommodate Linton's moods: "I knew now that I mustn't tease him, as he was ill; and I spoke softly and put no questions, and avoided irritating him in any way" (250). She is also privy to his violent temper, demonstrated when Hareton angers him: "Devil! devil! I'll kill you, I'll kill you!" (251). Even though she witnesses Linton behaving like his father, Cathy seems unconcerned by his behaviour; rather, she is alarmed by his "dreadful fit of coughing" (251), brought on by his outburst. Linton is not a Romantic hero, but somehow Cathy is attracted to him and she risks alienating her father to be with him. She is taken in by Linton's helplessness and his manipulation convinces her that she must tolerate his behaviour: "Your kindness has made me love you deeper than if I deserved your love, and though I couldn't, and cannot help showing my nature to you, I regret it and repent it, and shall regret and repent it, till I die!" (254). The depth of Cathy's emotional attachment to Linton is revealed by her reaction to his words: They both cry "the whole time" she is with him. She feels sorry for Linton and continues with "dreary and troubled" visits, and learns to "endure" his "selfishness and spite," along with "his sufferings" as a part of their relationship (254).

Hareton repulses Catherine with his lack of education and manners and she cruelly mocks him when he is unable to read the date above his name over the door of Wuthering Heights: "'Oh, you dunce!' I said, laughing heartily at his failure" (249). Her inclusion of this incident in her narrative demonstrates her sense of superiority over Hareton; she boasts of her cruelty and is amazed that "he imagined himself to be as accomplished as Linton . . . and was marvelously discomfited that I didn't think the same" (250). Cathy has trouble believing that Hareton is also her cousin because he is so different from her and Linton. She takes every opportunity to mock and insult him, and takes Linton's side against him. When Linton threatens to kill Hareton and then collapses, Cathy blames Hareton and turns her anger on him: "I was ready to tear my hair off my head! I sobbed and wept so that my eyes were almost blind" (252). Invoking her father's name, she threatens him with prison and hanging and finally drives him from the room. Cathy's relationship with Hareton changes dramatically in the closing pages of the novel, and her narrative illustrates the difficult beginning of their love for each other.

The ultimate tool of Heathcliff's revenge is his son. Linton's narrative serves to demonstrate his childishness and cruelty. He is stuck in his infancy and his lack of emotional development is demonstrated by his account of his wedding night. Nelly is the interlocutor; she is looking for information about Catherine (she has returned after escaping from Heathcliff) and Linton is the only one who will tell her what has taken place: "The infant, having performed his part in his father's scheme, is enjoying the fruits of his success. He is newly empowered, with physical comforts to hand, and a patriarchal husband's developed sense of his rights" (McMaster 8). He tells Nelly about his and Catherine's disturbing wedding night and "speaks with the authority of a newly empowered narrator and husband" (McMaster 9). Linton's focus is on the material gain that has resulted from his marriage to Catherine and the sudden authority that he now has over her as his wife, and he does not comprehend the trauma that has been inflicted on Cathy or that he is being used by his father.

There is immaturity in Linton's belief that his own needs and comfort are the only things that are important. He boasts that he has taken ownership of everything that is Cathy's, a belief that has been instilled by his father: "He says, she hates me, and wants me to die, that she may have my money, but she shan't have it; and she shan't go home! . . . I shall be master of the Grange . . . and Catherine always spoke of it as *her* house. It isn't hers! It's mine – papa says everything she has is mine" (2.14.279-80). Linton describes the symbolic taking of ownership of Catherine in Heathcliff's seizing the locket around her neck; it contains pictures of her mother and father, symbolizing her connection to her past. Linton does not even realize that giving Nelly these details only confirms his own weakness, as he would not have the independence of thought to take Cathy's locket, a symbolic severance of her family ties and the consummation of their marriage: "Heathcliff's appropriation of the property and physical abuse of the bride leaves her in effect deflowered" (McMaster 10). Cathy tries to protect her locket but it is forcibly taken from her and she is "struck" by Heathcliff; he is now in complete control. This act only serves to impress Linton: "I wink to see my father strike a dog, or a horse, he does it so hard – yet I was glad at first – she deserved punishing for pushing me" (281). As much as he fears his father, Linton envies his power, but he does not realize that he too is a pawn in Heathcliff's plans for revenge. He believes that his father has forced Cathy to marry him so that he may have her property, but he has no idea that

Heathcliff is simply making use of his marriage and waiting for him to die so that he may take possession of the Linton property.

Linton is sickly, spoiled, and feeble, and in his narrative becomes despicable in his enjoyment of the suffering of the girl who has cared for him and attended to his every whim. Having gotten his first taste of power, Linton is able to disregard Cathy's suffering because it makes him feel strong – a sensation that is new to him. Catherine is just a means to an end for him now; he is annoyed with her "crying continually and she looks so pale and wild, I'm afraid of her" (281). Linton's fear of his wife demonstrates his weakness because he knows that he is powerless without his father. His feelings may stem partly from a twinge of guilt; however, he shows that he is not capable of loving Catherine in his treatment of her. He turns against her to such a degree that he will not help her to get to her dying father, forcing her to sneak out the window and climb down the lattice (ironically, it is the same window through which Lockwood sees the ghost of Catherine I). Through his narrative, Linton reveals how undesirable he is and the extent to which the corrupting influence of Heathcliff threatens to destroy the lives of all those who come into contact with him.

The final embedded narrative of the novel is delivered by Zillah, the housekeeper at Wuthering Heights. Unlike the other subsidiary narrators, Zillah does not provide valuable insight into herself through her story. Almost completely absent is significant personal bias, with the exception of Zillah's disdain for Catherine II, which does not affect the story. This narrative fulfills its purpose as a plot device, filling in a part of the story to which Nelly cannot be an eye-witness. By bringing the reader up to date on the death of Linton and the newly developing relationship between Hareton and Catherine II, Zillah's narrative is a convenience, a conventional passage designed to fill in the details that are out of the main narrator's reach.

Through a skillful employment of a complex narrative technique, Emily Brontë is able to construct a world of "infinite possibilities and few certainties" (Vogler 13), articulated by the voices of her characters. At the end of the novel, the story comes full circle as the ghosts of the past are laid to rest and the promise of the future lives in Catherine II and Hareton Earnshaw. Emily leaves a vivid imprint of the characters she creates and the world that they inhabit through the use of many voices telling stories. According to Tanner, the horror and brutality of the novel is "refracted" through the narrative levels, in effect filtering the anguish and passion in their words (109); however, I believe this technique has the opposite effect. The voices of the narrators create immediacy as characters speak from the past and from the grave. The reader is hurled into the world of the novel from the beginning; the experience comes before the explanation, creating an intense focus on the voices and the stories they tell.

Chapter Three
Charlotte Brontë: The Dynamics of Power

Charlotte Brontë makes skilled use of embedded narratives in her major novels: *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853).[1] It is through these narratives that Charlotte emphasizes the dynamics of power that exist between her major characters. She seeks to strengthen her novels by placing the embedded narratives to create the maximum effect with their content. They are delivered by characters who dramatize the power struggles in each of the novels and they illuminate the relationships at the core of Charlotte's fiction. She fills in the details of the worlds she constructs with these narratives that help to create a strong sense of purpose and bring events and characters into focus. Although these narratives are not responsible for the success or failure of the novels on their own, they point to strengths and weaknesses of the texts.

Charlotte's work focuses on the intimate emotional and psychological details found in the internal world of her main characters. In each of her novels, she attempts to present a compelling portrait of a central character, illuminated by the contributions of other characters. Charlotte is most effective when using the autobiographical narrative form: In *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, Charlotte succeeds in creating a close relationship between the reader and the primary narrator – the autobiographer (Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe) - but struggles with her construction and presentation of *Shirley* using the third-person point of view. Charlotte's heroines exist in a world in which they must struggle to find their identity, and where they are at a distinct disadvantage because of their status as women. The disparity of power between the heroines and the men that are central to their lives is at issue throughout each of Charlotte's novels, and it is only through a shift in these dynamics that the heroines find resolution. In each case, the embedded narratives point to the strengths/weaknesses of the novels in which they are found.

Jane Eyre: Her Own Story

In its structure and focus, *Jane Eyre* is Charlotte's best novel. Pauline Nestor deems it her "most complete novel, controlled and manageable in ways that her later works are not" (50). The story revolves around the life of the primary narrator, Jane Eyre Rochester, and everything that happens in the novel is directly related to her development. Tom Winnifrith characterizes the novel as so focused that "the personality of the heroine holds the novel together, and each separate episode is necessary to establish the singleness of this personality" (109). Every aspect of the novel is of significance to Jane herself, creating a strong focus and unity in the text.

When Jane allows another voice to assume the narrative, the reader learns about the speaker, but the information is most significant in its implications for Jane, who is the interlocutor of each narrative: "These narratives within the narrative . . . raise questions about exactly what kind of a story Jane's life might be" (Bodenheimer 396). The life that she presents to the reader is characterized by a struggle between passion and reason.[2] The embedded narratives point to Jane's attempts to resolve the opposing forces acting upon her and bring coherence to her personal journey to discover her identity.[3] She begins as a

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[1] I have chosen not to address *The Professor* (published posthumously in 1857) because it is logical to assume that *Villette* is the revised version of the earlier work.

[2] The two dominant critical interpretations of the text relating to this conflict are opposite in their conclusions: One view is that Jane finds a balance between passion and reason in her return to Rochester; other critics have argued that Jane regresses in this decision. Pauline Nestor describes these two possible readings: "the one celebrating reconciliation and wholeness, the other exposing a disharmony and heterogeneity that is finally eliminated only by recourse to fantastical evasion in the novel's ending" (76). Elaine Showalter views the ending as "the integration of the spirit and the body" (113), while Gilbert and Gubar question its optimism (369-70).

[3] Jane, as a character in her own story, has narratives layered into her primary narrative. I have chosen not to address these narratives due to the substantial critical analysis that exists on this subject.

powerless child and evolves to take control of her life and find happiness on her own terms.

It is the search for self-knowledge that guides Jane's story. This process occurs in five stages, structured around the five locations at which Jane lives: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Marsh End/Moor House, and Ferndean. It is because of her status as an outsider and the struggle to establish herself as an individual that Jane does not provide any other narrative voice than her own in the first two segments of the novel. It is not until she reaches Thornfield that Jane finds the confidence that enables her to take a tentative step toward having closer relationships; she now allows others to tell part of her story. Jane remains guarded, however, and even when she allows another person to speak at length, the story remains very much her own. There is one common thread running through the embedded narratives in the novel: Each contains elements of great significance for Jane, if not a re-telling of her own story with the addition of new information. As she searches for a sense of security in her identity, Jane repeatedly hears her own story told back to her: "The characters in Jane's life are of crucial importance in her search for a personal mythology" (Tromly 51). Even when Jane, as a listener, does not realize that what she is hearing is of importance to her, Jane, the narrator, has carefully placed these narratives to reveal the details of her life laid bare in the stories of others. All of the embedded narratives are delivered by men and, with the exception of the innkeeper's account of the fire at Thornfield, Mr. Rochester and St. John Rivers narrate all of these segments as representations of the opposing forces tearing Jane in two. She must find her way through the re-tellings in order to assert her identity and find agency despite the efforts of others to control and manipulate her for their own purposes. The dynamics of Jane's relationships and her self-concept evolve through the accounts of Rochester, St. John, and the innkeeper.

Mr. Rochester is the single most powerful force acting upon Jane in the novel and she struggles under the weight of his influence. Even though her relationship with St. John offers a similar temptation to abandon her self, the source of her attraction to the life that he offers is only a reaction to the feelings for Rochester that she is trying to suppress. Rochester delivers four narratives that illuminate his relationship with Jane and the dynamic between them that changes throughout the novel. In each narrative, Rochester's past overlaps with his present – a past that has an increasing significance for and effect on Jane as she becomes involved with him. In these narratives, the arc of Rochester's character in the novel is revealed as it was to Jane, providing insight into both Rochester and Jane as characters in her story.

Rochester uses similar devices in each of his narratives; however, there is a marked change in his motive, tone, and rhetoric as the story progresses. Using pauses and interruptions in concert with figurative language and physical gestures, Rochester tries to bring Jane closer to him. From the beginning, it seems that Rochester has something to hide, and there is ambivalence in what he says and does that suggests a struggle within. His narratives are a part of the novel's structure in that they help to create several of the most crucial and dramatic moments that demonstrate the changing dynamics between him and Jane.

In his first narrative, Rochester tells the story of a past relationship with a mistress, Céline Varens (the mother of Adèle, Jane's charge as a governess). This narrative occurs early in the relationship between Jane and Rochester, offering a glimpse into his past and explaining how he came to need a governess – the reason that Jane comes to Thornfield. He tells a very personal story that is interspersed with cryptic references to his past and his current situation. He seems to be confiding in Jane early in their acquaintance, but it becomes evident as the story progresses that he holds back information (specifically, the truth about his wife and his past dalliances with more than one mistress). Rochester portrays himself in a positive light, as a victim of a cruel woman, using a self-deprecating style that is prevalent in his story-telling. In this narrative, Rochester refers to himself as "ugly," "British gnome," "spoonie" (147), "dupe," and "beauté mâle" (151). He furthers his humility in his ironic references to Céline in elevated terms: "Gallic sylph" (147), "flame," "Mon Ange" (148), and "my charmer" (150).

Rochester has the ability to create an immediacy about a scene from his past by bringing a sensory and emotional reality to his telling. In his story about Céline, Rochester brings Jane into the world of that night by describing his surroundings – the sights and scents - and the emotions that he experienced. He pauses, just before he describes the evening that he learned of Céline's betrayal, to light a cigar, as he remembers doing that night: "I sat down, took out a cigar, - I will take one now, if you will excuse me" (1.15.147). This pause delays the beginning of the story, creating anticipation and providing an indication of the deliberateness with which he speaks. The cigar also functions as a link to the past and a parallel to the present, symbolic of the interlocking of the two. By lighting the cigar, Rochester creates a moment of intimacy and informality between him and Jane, inviting her to be at ease while she listens to him. Other references to sensory perceptions help to create a mood that makes the past come to life:

> it was a warm night, and I was tired with strolling through Paris, so I sat down in her boudoir; happy to breathe the air consecrated so lately by her presence . . . I was just beginning to stifle with the fumes of conservatory flowers and sprinkled essences, when I bethought myself to open the window and step out on to the balcony. It was moonlight, and gas-light besides, and very still and serene. (147)

After setting the scene, Rochester describes Céline's arrival in an "elegant close carriage drawn by a beautiful pair of English horses . . . in the brilliant city-night" (148). He has a physical response to Céline, indicative of his strong feelings for her: "of course my heart thumped with impatience" (148). The vividness of the experience is communicated in the way Rochester has retained every image and detail in his mind. His jealousy is conveyed by his references to Céline's lover as "cavalier," "a young roué of a vicomte," "a brainless and viscous youth" (150), "a rival," and "feeble" (151).

He furthers the emotional quality of his experience with references to jealousy that are intertwined with pauses that interrupt the flow of the story. He first mentions it to Jane in the form of a question: "You never felt jealousy did you, Miss Eyre? Of course not: I need not ask you; because you never felt love" (148). Rochester makes the assumption that Jane has never been in love, an answer that he does not wait for her to confirm or deny. He furthers his presumptive address by making a strange prediction: "I tell you – and you may mark my words – you will come some day to a craggy pass of the channel, where the whole of life's stream will be broken up into whirl and tumult, foam and noise: either you will be dashed to atoms on crag-points, or lifted up and borne on by some master wave into a calmer current – as I am now" (148). This imagery points to

Rochester's past and the future that Jane will experience. These comments also reveal the deliberateness of design behind Rochester's pursuit of Jane; he intends to be both the "whirl and tumult" and the "master wave" that will take her "into a calmer current."

Rochester uses the dramatic pause to great effect, interrupting the story to provide strange insights into his character. In this narrative, he speaks cryptically about his past after a pause during which he stares at his home: "how long have I abhorred the very thought of it; shunned it like a great plague-house! How I do still abhor . . . " (149). To Jane, this statement has little meaning because she does not know the cause of Rochester's suffering. He explains himself, again without revealing anything specific: "I was arranging a point with my destiny" (149). Of course, this comment could not have been understood by Jane at the time, but Jane, the narrator, is signaling to the reader that she was guilty of naiveté or even willful blindness in regard to Rochester's troubled past and bears some responsibility in not recognizing it as an obstacle. In retrospect, the "point" that Rochester is "arranging" is his decision to pursue a relationship with Jane despite the existence of his wife. He refers to Macbeth (a symbol of guilt) and to the writing on the wall in the Old Testament book of Daniel (a warning of God's judgment). Rochester is cognizant of the problems that his past presents and he struggles with this knowledge; however, because he does not offer Jane the opportunity to hear the truth, he is guilty of deception and creates the potential for disaster.

Rochester rushes through the last part of his narrative (which contains the information about how he came to be caring for Céline's child), creating a diversion from his feelings and from the truth that he is, or could be, Adèle's father. Having told Jane his story, Rochester claims to be "refreshed" by sharing his "secrets": "At first, Rochester himself appears to have no secrets" (York 63) because he seems to share openly details about his past with a new acquaintance; however, this willingness makes his motives suspect. There is also a demonstration of the dynamic between Jane and Rochester at this stage. Rochester asserts his dominance through frequent digressions, not allowing Jane to move him back to his story. He returns to his narrative only when he is ready, demonstrating his power as a story-teller and his control over the verbal exchange between them. Rochester uses his position of power to test Jane, studying her reactions and creating a sense of trust by confiding in her: "The test is neither fair nor accurate, since he has two very different sins in his past; in leading Jane to assume that his soul's burden has to do with his French mistress he is blurring them together" (Williams 33). It is this test that represents the groundwork of Rochester's plan to pursue Jane despite the existence of his wife: "She cannot be expected to see that Céline, and Adèle . . . are nothing but smokescreens: masks, shields, or curtains drawn over Rochester's real secret upstairs" (Williams 33). Although there is a degree of honesty in his revelations about Céline, what he conceals about Bertha has ramifications for Jane that do not justify his keeping such a secret from her.

Rochester's second narrative takes place after he and Jane are engaged. At this point in their relationship, he has become comfortable with her and confident that their marriage will take place (and that Bertha will remain a secret). His growing comfort is reflected in the jovial tone with which he tells Adèle the story of the fairy, a thinly veiled account of his engagement to Jane. Although Rochester tells Adèle the story, it is directed, on a different level, to Jane, who is riding with them in the carriage. This narrative points to the unreal quality of Rochester's relationship with Jane in the imagery of the moon and the fairy that he uses throughout this passage. He tells Adèle that he will "take mademoiselle to the moon . . . and [she] shall live with me there, and only me" (2.9.279). Rochester also describes how he will provide for Jane's needs in this isolated environment: He will "gather manna for her morning and night," "carry her" to the "edge of a crater" on a lunar volcano when she is cold, and make her clothes from "a white or a pink cloud" and "a rainbow" (279). These words engage Adèle in an imaginative way, but for Jane, they represent the kind of future that she would have as Rochester's wife in their current relationship dynamic. He envisions a future in which they live in isolation, beyond the reach of his past and in a situation where he would have absolute control.

Rochester's problematic view of Jane is further revealed by his characterization of her as a "fairy" who came to him after he had begun "to write about a misfortune that befell me long ago, and a wish I had for happy days to come" (280). Again, Rochester's past is mentioned in a non-specific way. Throughout the novel, Rochester refers to Jane in otherworldly terms, calling her a fairy, an elf, etc. In this narrative, he makes Jane into a being out of a fable, describing their first meeting and engagement as a scene from a fairy-tale. Rochester ends his narrative with the fairy giving him "a pretty gold ring" in order to allow him to follow her to the moon: "'Put it,' she said, 'on the fourth finger of my left hand, and I am yours, and you are mine; and we shall leave earth, and make our own heaven yonder" (280). Jane begins to feel uncomfortable with Rochester's view of her. Although they are about to be married, the dynamic of their relationship has not shifted; Rochester is the one with all the power and he is defining their relationship in his own terms. His comfort with Jane increases as she remains under his influence, unable to control what is happening to her.

Rochester's third narrative occurs at the heart of the novel, accounting for his past with Bertha Mason in an attempt to dissuade Jane from leaving Thornfield after their wedding has been interrupted. The revelation of the truth creates an immediate reversal of the dynamics between them; Jane suddenly has the power to determine their future and Rochester is now the one at the mercy of her decision. Although he retains many of the devices that he used in previous narratives, the calmness of his delivery has disappeared. He begins rationally, taking an attorney-like approach to his argument in starting from the beginning of his relationship with Bertha and working through to the present: "I will in a few words show you the real state of the case" (3.1.321). Rochester demonstrates his ability to think quickly in order to make his situation appear as sympathetic as possible. Although he was tricked into the marriage, Rochester still bears the responsibility for lying to Jane by deliberately concealing the truth and he tries desperately to justify his decision to lie.

In this narrative, Rochester takes on a different tone than in his previous narratives; instead of acting from a position of power and planning his words, he is now reacting to a situation that is beyond his control. He speaks quickly and without the imagery of his other stories. He is also more direct in his address to Jane, and her reactions, a diverting study for him earlier in their acquaintance, are now vital to the survival of their relationship. Until the end of his narrative, Rochester maintains his confidence; a fact that he demonstrates in his account of his marriage, Bertha's mental illness, and his mistresses. Rochester seems to believe that, although he has been taken by surprise with the revelation of his wife's existence, Jane will remain with him after she hears his explanation.

Rochester reveals his desperation in the grasping form of his narrative. Instead of a carefully constructed ploy to play with or to test her, this narrative is designed to prove to Jane how much he loves her and to keep her in his grasp. Rochester manages to create sympathy in his description of the cruel way in which he was tricked into marrying Bertha; however, this effect is dampened by his somewhat self-centred concern for his own situation, his dismissal of Bertha, and his account of the string of mistresses that he left behind after failing to find his "ideal of a woman" (328). Jane accepts Rochester's story and forgives him, but she cannot compromise herself by staying with a married man whom she fears "would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated [the memory of his mistresses]" (329).

The digression remains a vital part of Rochester's narrative technique in this section. He moves away from his description of Bertha and his search for love into an account of how he observed and tested Jane throughout the early stages of their relationship. His description is chilling in the calculation and manipulation behind his interest in Jane: "you were not aware that I thought of you, or watched for you . . . I observed you – myself unseen" (330). Rochester tells Jane how he moved from studying her at a distance to creating situations in which he could observe her reactions to his behaviour:

> I was at once content and stimulated with what I saw: I liked what I had seen, and wished to see more. Yet, for a long time, I treated you distantly, and sought your company rarely . . . I wished to see whether you would seek me if I shunned you . . . I wondered what you thought of me – or if you ever thought of me: to find this out, I resumed my notice of you . . . I

> permitted myself the delight of being kind to you . . . I used to enjoy a chance meeting with you. (331-32)

In recounting his observations of Jane, Rochester is attempting to convince her of the depth of his love; however, he does not succeed, due in part to his admissions of a deliberate plan behind what Jane perceived as a natural progression of their relationship.

Although she is affected by Rochester's words, Jane remains strong in her resolve to leave him. It is in the realization of her decision that Rochester loses his confidence in his ability to persuade her with words; he responds to this feeling of weakness by becoming angry and physically taking hold of Jane. Realizing that she is now in control, he moves closer, "embracing" her and then kissing her forehead and cheek in an effort to create a physical and emotional response; when she continues to resist, he "seizes" her arm and "grasps" her waist, shaking her "with the force of his hold" (335). With the new-found strength of her convictions, Jane is able to resist his temptations, both verbal and physical, and finally severs contact, leaving Thornfield behind.

Rochester's final narrative of the novel occurs after Jane returns to him at Ferndean. Both have come through life-altering experiences that have affected the way they view themselves and each other. Jane has discovered her family and nearly lost herself in St. John Rivers' world and Rochester has been maimed and blinded in the fire that destroyed his home. Jane returns knowing who she is and how she feels, with the ability to assert herself. Rochester's narrative tells of his conversion and the night that he called out to Jane and heard her voice in response. There are several indications that Rochester has truly changed: His tone is humble and his narrative is brief, giving only the details necessary to describe his experience. There is a simplicity and honesty in his words: "I did wrong . . . I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconcilement to my Maker. I began sometimes to pray: very brief prayers they were, but very sincere" (470-71). Rochester has finally taken responsibility for his actions and it is this recognition that makes it possible for him and Jane to be together.

When he tells Jane of the night he called out her name, there is no apparent motive beneath his telling her about it other than to let her know that he has been thinking of her during her absence and to explain his disbelief when she first arrived. As Jane confirms that the day and time match the same moment that she heard Rochester's voice at Marsh End, she keeps her realization to herself. In doing this, Jane makes sure that Rochester does not feel that he has the power to summon her. Although she knows that their connection is profound, she does not allow him to share in this feeling. There is a difference in the way she withholds information from Rochester: She does not keep anything from him that would be hurtful and she cannot be considered deceitful. She simply makes sure that the balance between them is maintained by ensuring that Rochester believes she has returned for her own reasons. Jane's position of power is demonstrated by her choice to keep this information from Rochester. She is not being cruel or manipulative, but she does deprive him of the wonder that such an experience would excite.

The other significant male in Jane's life is St. John Rivers. When she leaves Rochester after discovering the truth about his wife, Jane asserts herself for the first time; however, she must start her life over with nothing but her experiences to guide her: "The hectic forward movement of the love story and the mystery checked, the narrative comes to a close and curls back on itself" (Beaty 82). Jane is transformed by this experience and comes to Marsh End as a woman with secrets, "with a story to conceal and a mystery to solve" (Bodenheimer 400). Jane is now the one who is haunted by her past; however, she differs from Rochester in that her struggle is an inner one that cannot harm anyone but herself. When she meets St. John Rivers, Jane encounters another influential figure who takes her into his world and attempts to remake her in the image he envisions.

St. John functions as Rochester's opposite in the novel, but they have a relationship with Jane and the intention to marry her in common. St. John has two embedded narratives, an account of his call to be a missionary and a story immediately recognizable as Jane's own. By telling Jane about his call from God, St. John is introducing the idea of missionary work into her mind. He addresses the mystery of her past directly: "What you had left before I saw you, of course I do not know; but I counsel you to resist, firmly, every temptation which would incline you to look back" (3.5.380). By referring to the unknown past to which Jane seems drawn, St. John is capitalizing on what he believes to be her weakness; he is attempting to draw her toward his way of life by convincing her to let go of the past. To illustrate his point, he uses the example of his own call to be a missionary: "A year ago, I was myself intensely miserable . . . my life was so wretched, it must be changed, or I must die. After a season of darkness and struggling, light broke and relief fell . . . my powers heard a call from heaven to rise . . . God had an errand for me" (381). The cause of St. John's "wretchedness" is his love for Rosamond Oliver, but he is not willing to be as revealing as Rochester was. The scenario in St. John's narrative could easily be applied to Jane's situation, and he is aware that she is at a point in her life at which she is susceptible to influence. He leaves her with a positive view of the relief and change that answering God's call brought to his life: "A missionary I resolved to be. From that moment my state of mind changed: the fetters dissolved and dropped from every faculty, leaving nothing of bondage but its galling soreness – which only time can heal" (381). Jane is tempted, for a time, to answer St. John's "call" to assist him in his work because she could resign her self to his direction, and to God's work, to hide from her pain.

The past that Jane tries to keep hidden is exposed in St. John's final narrative. Jane keeps her identity a secret, but St. John discovers the truth, including some new details. He first makes a point of establishing himself as the speaker: "I find the matter will be better managed by my assuming the narrator's part, and converting you into a listener" (3.7.399). St. John is taking away Jane's voice for the moment, making her the listener to her own story. He warns Jane that "the story will sound somewhat hackneyed in your ears: but stale details often regain a degree of freshness when they pass through new lips" (399). This "degree of freshness" comes both from the fact that St. John is telling the story and from the new information that he reveals.

In trying to pique Jane's curiosity by referring to details that she will recognize, St. John is looking for a reaction to indicate that she realizes he knows the truth about her. He plays with Jane, mentioning her aunt's name in the context of his story, provoking a reaction from her: "you start – did you hear a noise?" (399). St. John continues, but Jane's stunned silence is broken only by the name of Mr. Rochester. St. John does not explain himself at this point, but he does acknowledge her: "I can guess your feelings . . . but restrain them for a while . . . hear me to the end" (400). Jane is reacting emotionally to Rochester's name, but St. John pushes her back into the role of the listener. Jane allows him to continue, demonstrating a level of trust, but showing the position of vulnerability in which she is placed by the power of the knowledge that he holds. She has no choice but to listen.

Once he finishes the main part of his story, Jane immediately inquires about Rochester with a barrage of questions, marking the end of St. John's narrative. The narrative is hers again and she saturates it with her concern for Rochester. Even when St. John reveals his knowledge of her name and the fact that he has been talking about her, she remains focused on her only concern, Rochester. St. John responds by telling Jane that she has inherited her uncle's fortune and that she is related to the Rivers family. The inheritance and the family relationships that are revealed give Jane independence and a sense of connection, filling two large gaps in her life. She is no longer an outsider and, ironically, it is this sense of identity, in combination with her love for Rochester, that frees Jane to deny St. John's proposal of marriage and life as a missionary and to hear Rochester's voice calling her to follow her heart.

Jane encounters her story one last time when she is searching for Rochester. After coming upon the burned-out ruins of Thornfield, she listens to an innkeeper who accounts for the condition of the estate. Although the innkeeper's narrative is important for what it reveals about Jane, his function as a narrator is simply to relate information that Jane could not otherwise have obtained. Like Zillah in *Wuthering Heights*, he is a plot device and has no motive for telling the story other than to answer Jane's questions. Once again, Jane hears a re-telling of her story by a man who adds new information. There is a strong indication of Jane's maturity and strength in the way she receives this version of her story. Instead of listening passively or fearing what she will hear, she interrupts frequently, not allowing the innkeeper to go into the details. Jane does not *ask* him to skip the story of her wedding – she *commands* him: "You shall tell me this part of the story another time . . . but now I have a particular reason for wishing to hear all about the fire" (3.10.450). Jane has confidence in who she is and what she wants and she is able to extract the information she seeks from the innkeeper (who is eager to tell the story) and act upon it to create the life that she wants for herself. She is in control of her story, posing questions and making comments to direct the innkeeper away from the details with which she is familiar and toward the information that she needs. She is single-minded in her focus, undeterred by the echoes of the past. She is also provided with information that reinforces her love for Rochester – his heroism during the fire.

Jane has won the power struggle with Rochester and St. John and the extremes that they represent. By directing the innkeeper through his narrative, Jane is signalling that she has moved beyond the negative experiences of the past that threatened her identity and autonomy; she has found a balance between passion and reason and is able to return to Rochester in a condition that makes it possible for her to live with him while retaining her sense of individuality.

Shirley: Strength and Weakness

The struggle for power in *Shirley* differs from that of *Jane Eyre* in that the heroine begins her story in a position of strength, realizing her powerlessness only after she decides to marry. Shirley Keeldar, one of the novel's two heroines, is a wealthy land-owner who has influence in her community; however, her power is limited by the fact that she is a woman and, ultimately, she must relinquish any claim to that power in order to marry the man she loves. Charlotte Brontë tries, unsuccessfully, to make *Shirley* a social novel. Although she effectively demonstrates the limitations imposed on women during this period, she does not realistically capture Shirley's journey from "Captain Keeldar" to "Mrs. Louis Moore." Her transformation is sudden and artificial, lacking the drama and outrage that could more effectively portray the heroine's reversal. It is through the narratives of Shirley, Mrs. Pryor, Robert Moore, and Louis Moore that the disparity of power between the genders is demonstrated; however, the inherent problems in the novel are also present in these narratives.

In her article, "Narrative Annexes in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*," Suzanne Keen examines spaces in the text in which characters are free to think, speak, and behave in a way that is uninhibited by the rules that govern the world of the novel: "Deriving their contrastive power from the energies of both interpolation and shifted settings, annexes provide textual spaces where the expectations and possibilities differ from those of the primary text" (107). Keen includes what I have defined as embedded narratives (calling them "interpolated") in her discussion, but her definition of the annex includes other sections of the text that do not fall under my definition (e.g. the night Shirley and Caroline Helstone witness the disturbance at the Hollow), and excludes others that I include (e.g. Mrs. Pryor's narrative). She identifies narrative annexes as the "places where problematic changes of direction are instigated" because characters are freed "temporarily from the restricted fictional world in which they move" while being "redirected . . . back into a retrograde marriage plot" (107). *Shirley* has often been criticized for a lack of unity and focus and the embedded narratives validate the view of the narrative structure as problematic.

Shirley Keeldar has two sections in the text in which her voice speaks over the primary narrator, her vision of Eve and her story of being bitten by a rabid dog. Her vision of Eve demonstrates the imagination and energy that characterizes the Shirley that enters the novel in the second volume. She challenges those around her (especially Caroline Helstone and Robert Moore) with her ability to see outside the normal constraints of society and her unwillingness to accept the limitations placed on her as a woman. Shirley changes, however, when she decides to marry Louis Moore; she is silenced in the text as she surrenders to her love for Louis.

Shirley's transformation occurs quickly and without resistance. She becomes altered for the first time after she has been bitten by a rabid dog, and her narrative, told to Louis Moore, is indicative of this change. In telling Louis about her experience of being bitten by Phoebe, Shirley relinquishes a measure of control, giving Louis information that she has tried to keep a secret. Her acquiescence to Louis' insistence that she tell her story is a surrender uncharacteristic of the Shirley in the novel to this point. The change is demonstrated in the difference in her narrative style in that she is succinct and the language is stripped down. She describes the initial condition of the dog that she recognized as Phoebe and her attempt to "coax her into the house, and give her some water and dinner" (3.5.509). It is her response to the dog's plight that puts Shirley in harm's way: The dog was "too flurried" to recognize her and bit her "so as to draw blood" when she "attempted to pat her head" (509). Soon after she is injured, Shirley learns that the dog is "raging mad" (510).

Shirley's narrative ends with the expression of her fear that she has contracted a fatal disease. The visionary quality of her words has disappeared and the harsh reality of her situation is all that remains. Shirley demonstrates her strength and stubbornness in her self-cauterization of the wound and her self-imposed isolation after the incident. By expressing her fears and trusting Louis she is admitting that she does not have control over everything in her life and must rely on someone outside herself for help:

> Shirley . . . fears that her strength may deprive her of love, and as a result she abandons her strength for love . . . She knows she must confide in Louis that she fears the dog bite she received from Phoebe may be fatal; by not revealing this fear she starves herself of her need for self-expression and is able to recover only by expressing her fears to Louis and receiving his reassurance. (Hoeveler and Jadwin 102)

As Hoeveler and Jadwin point out, this incident is symbolic of Shirley's inner struggle between her autonomy and strength and her love for Louis. Phoebe represents Louis in this instance – he is familiar to her, but she is afraid to reach out to him for fear of being hurt by what she must relinquish in order to admit her feelings. However, by turning to Louis in her time of mortal fear, Shirley moves toward a relationship in which she will rely on him and her sense of individuality and power will fade into the background, just as she retreats when she is wounded by Phoebe. The Phoebe narrative marks the last time that Shirley narrates; from this point on, Louis and Robert Moore dominate the novel.

The only other woman that has a narrative in the novel is Mrs. Pryor, Shirley's governess and Caroline's mother. Her narrative serves to illuminate the limited options available to women by providing an account of her experiences as a governess in the Hardman family. She delivers her narrative to Caroline in an effort to dissuade her from becoming a governess by telling her about the deplorable conditions under which she was forced to live and work. Her words are effective because, although her experience took place many years in the past, Mrs. Pryor is able to recall specific details to recreate moments that reveal the reality of this kind of life.

There are two important details in Mrs. Pryor's narrative: The class distinction between the governess and her employers and the fact that Mrs. Pryor encourages respect for this system despite its apparent injustice. The class-divide is emphasized by the symbolic names: Grey (Mrs. Pryor's maiden name) and Hardman. Mrs. Pryor, shunned by men, women, children, and servants, becomes "sedentary, solitary, constrained, joyless, toilsome" (2.10.376). Her emotional and physical state deteriorate to the point that she "sickened," a condition that is characterized by "the lady of the house" as "wounded vanity" (376). In another example, Mrs. Pryor describes being lectured by Miss Hardman: "WE need the imprudencies, extravagances, mistakes, and crimes of a certain number of fathers to sow the seed from which WE reap the harvest of governesses" (377). There is irony, even humour, in this account, but the powerlessness that Mrs. Pryor experienced is evident in the emphasis on the "we" of Miss Hardman's class as separate from the social standing of the governess.

Despite this sense of powerlessness, Mrs. Pryor distinguishes her own experience from the way she views those in the Hardmans' position in general: "Implicit submission to authorities, scrupulous deference to our betters . . . are, in my opinion, indispensable to the wellbeing of every community" (377). It is an indication of the level of acceptance of the class system for Mrs. Pryor to tell Caroline of the difficulties of being a governess while at the same time endorsing the system that placed her in this position. With this warning and the deeply entrenched social values apparent in Mrs. Pryor's narrative, Caroline's options have become even more limited than they were before she hears this story. If she heeds her mother's warning, Caroline has but two choices remaining: She can marry (and at this point in the novel she does not believe that she will) or she can remain single and become a "spinster." The limiting of Caroline's choices functions to steer her toward the marriage plot. Mrs. Pryor's narrative, in addressing the social problem of the governess, works to push Caroline into the resolution toward which the novel is moving.

The momentum toward the marriage plot increases as Shirley loses prominence and Robert and Louis Moore begin to dominate the novel. Charles Burkhart calls the novel "episodic and awkward" because of the scenes narrated by Robert and Louis: "the story fails to dramatize just those actions which would seem *scènes obligatoires*" (80). Burkhart is referring to the scene in which Robert tells Mr. Yorke of Shirley's rejection of his marriage proposal and the journal entries that provide an account of Louis' relationship with Shirley. In light of the novel as a whole, these scenes are not as out of place as Burkhart suggests; rather, they are indicative of the male usurpation of the female voice in the novel. Robert and Louis' narratives fit into the design of the novel in their implications for Shirley; however, they are problematic in that the transition from Shirley's dominance of the novel to that of Robert and Louis is sudden and somewhat artificial because the process of this change is never explained.

The fact that the reader is not privy to the actual proposal scene involving Robert and Shirley points to the limitations on Shirley's power in that her words are being filtered. As narrator, Robert has control over the image he projects of a situation in which he was both surprised and embarrassed. He is able to tell Yorke, a disinterested third party, about his failure because he is now removed from the moment (a sufficient amount of time has passed to allow him some perspective) and he has thought carefully about it. He describes Shirley's strong, angry reaction to his proposal and he emphasizes the severity of her words and the way she made him feel. The power of the moment seems to belong to Shirley in that she has made Robert re-think his approach: "never more will I mention marriage to a woman, unless I feel love . . . No woman shall ever again look at me as Miss Keeldar looked – ever again feel towards me as Miss Keeldar felt: in no woman's presence will I ever again stand at once such a fool and such a knave – such a brute and such a puppy" (3.7.538); however, she is portrayed as being powerless in that her intentions are misread and her voice is displaced by Robert's in the text, as Shirley's version of these events is never presented.

Another key element of this narrative is the revelation of Shirley's assertion that she will not marry unless she is in love. She strongly implies her intention to marry only for love through her harsh reaction to Robert's assumption that she loved and wanted to marry him: "You insinuate that all the frank kindness I have shown you has been a complicated, a bold, and an immodest manoeuvre to ensnare a husband . . . Let me say this: - Your sight is jaundiced . . . Your mind is warped . . . Your tongue betrays you . . . I never loved you . . . My heart is as pure of passion for you as yours is barren of affection for me" (535-36). This speech is an open declaration of Shirley's determination to control her own destiny; however, by making this choice, she will be forced to sacrifice her power, strength, and, ultimately, her happiness, to marry the man she loves.

The mastering of Shirley in the novel is recounted in the written narratives of Louis Moore. His narratives fill the last chapters, demonstrating Charlotte's discomfort with the third-person narrative; in giving the narrative voice to Louis, she brings the story into the first person, allowing for a more intimate look at the events that close the novel. Shirley is clearly in love with Louis and makes the choice to marry him for that reason; however, the process of her decision is documented by Louis only, and he cannot explain the alteration that takes place after Shirley consents to be his wife. By writing down the details of his relationship with Shirley, Louis is literally writing her story – and writing over the narratives that she has spoken herself (just as he spoke over her devoir, "The First Bluestocking"). The primary narrator makes the reader into the sole listener to Louis' narrative as he becomes the teller of the story: "As Louis Moore speaks more and more for Shirley, and for the narrator, the dissenting voice of woman is progressively silenced. Louis Moore gains 'author-ity' in the narrative as his voice comes to dominate, as his interpretations are made final" (Lawson 739). Louis' voice is so strong in the last chapters that all other characters fall virtually silent outside of his narratives, the most notable of these being Shirley.

The fact that both of Louis' narratives are written and not spoken indicates that he is unable to communicate his feelings in any other way. He limits his words to the privacy of a journal because he is in a difficult position: He is socially inferior to Shirley because of his position as a tutor and cannot be sure if she will overlook this fact to marry him. There is also some uncertainty as to the extent of Shirley's feelings for him, and he must proceed somewhat cautiously in order to win her over. In writing, the barriers of class and uncertainty do not exist, and Louis is free in his expression: "It is pleasant to write about what is near and dear as the core of my heart: none can deprive me of this little book, and, through this pencil, I can say what I will – say what I dare utter to nothing living – say what I dare not *think* aloud" (3.6.521). Louis is also able to write unchecked by the physical presence of a listener who may respond to or judge his narratives, making his assumption of the narrative voice total.

Louis' first written narrative takes place when he is alone in Shirley's house. He uses the time to meditate and he is sentimental in his perceptions of his surroundings: "I may occupy her room; sit opposite her chair; rest my elbow on her table; have her little mementos about me" (521). Louis desires a closeness with Shirley that he cannot have in her presence and so he takes advantage of her absence to connect with the things that belong to her. He is also literally taking over Shirley's space in her home, symbolizing his taking control over her – the only way that they will be able to have a romantic relationship. There is no sinister intention in Louis' actions; he is simply filling the male role in a typical marriage plot and is, therefore, the catalyst for Shirley's change in the novel.

The language that Louis uses is elevated, especially in his descriptions of Shirley. He employs imagery, personification, and metaphor. Louis recognizes the change that Shirley has caused in him: "I used rather to like Solitude . . . Since that day I called S. to me in the school-room, and she came and sat so near my side; since she opened the trouble of her mind to me – asked my protection – appealed to my strength: since that hour, I abhor Solitude. Cold abstraction – fleshless skeleton – daughter – mother – and mate of Death!" (521). He is elated by a reaction in Shirley after they exchange glances one day: "I was alive with a life of Paradise, as she turned *her* glance from *my* glance, and softly averted her head to hide the suffusion of her cheek" (522). He muses that she has turned him into "a dreamer " and "a rapt, romantic lunatic," and has "inspired romance into my prosaic composition" (522). Shirley has the power to affect him, but he will use this change in his efforts to claim her as his possession.

Louis' newly inspired state leads him to colourful descriptions of Shirley: "I could call her nothing in my own mind save 'stainless virgin:' to my perception, a delicate splendour robed her, and the modesty of girlhood was her halo" (522). His language changes as he considers what makes him love Shirley, revealing the power dynamic of their relationship in his focus on the necessity of mastering her in order to make a marriage possible: "I worship her perfections; but it is her faults, or at least her foibles, that bring her near to me – that nestle her to my heart – that fold her about with my love – and that for a most selfish, but deeply-natural reason: these faults are the steps by which I mount to ascendancy over her" (522). Louis must, by necessity, view Shirley as a challenge, but his need to dominate her and his pleasure in the fact that he may do so because of weaknesses that he plans to exploit make his declarations of undying love less romantic. He characterizes Shirley as a "natural hill . . . whose summit it is pleasure to gain" (522), objectifying her in order to strengthen his own position. In another attempt to manufacture a sense of his own power, Louis creates a reversal in imagining himself "a king" and Shirley "the housemaid" (523). He places himself in this dynamic and pictures how he would feel if he were the one in the higher social position: "my eye would recognize her qualities; a true pulse would beat for her in my heart, though an unspanned gulf made acquaintance impossible . . . I could not help liking that Shirley" (523). There is also an element of wishful thinking in the fantasy in which Louis is engaging in that he is projecting a less intimidating image of Shirley: "Take from her her education – take her ornaments, her sumptuous dress – all extrinsic advantages – take all grace . . . present her to me at a cottage-door . . . I should like her" (523). There is an added sense of Louis' discomfort with the current state of his relationship with Shirley in his characterization of his feelings; he uses his imaginary peasant girl as a comparison: "I should not feel as I *now* do: I should find in her nothing divine; but whenever I met the young peasant, it would be with pleasure – whenever I left her, it would be with regret" (523). There is a sense that Louis is intimidated, even embarrassed, by Shirley and the disparity in their social positions and he enjoys imagining her as his social inferior. In light of his discomfort, Louis continues with his language of domination: "I delight to find her at fault, and were I always resident with her . . . She would just give me something to do; to rectify: a theme for my tutor-lectures" (523). Although Louis wishes his position were different, he longs to assume the role of Shirley's teacher again in order to assert control by correcting her faults. This position would give him power over Shirley in a way that he does not have in the present – the power to command, to teach, and to alter the course of her life.

Believing that Shirley "resigns herself to me unreluctantly" (524), Louis' language of power accelerates in its intensity. He draws a comparison between Shirley and Caroline, calling the latter his "equal" because of their similar social standing. That equality is not what Louis desires – he wants to marry a woman who is challenging: "*My* wife, if I ever marry, must stir my great frame with a sting now and then: she must furnish use to her husband's vast mass of patience. I was not made so enduring to be mated with a lamb: I should find more congenial responsibility in the charge of a young lioness or leopardess" (525). Clearly, the lamb, representing Caroline (her innocence and passivity), does not interest Loui[illegible] he wishes to have his patience tested by a "lioness or leopardess" like Shirley, whom he can overpower: "In managing the wild instincts of the scarce manageable 'bête fauve,' my powers would revel" (525). It is with resolution that

Louis decides that he must take control of Shirley: "However kindly the hand – if it is feeble, it cannot bend Shirley; and she must be bent: it cannot curb her, and she must be curbed" (525). He seems to relish the struggle that lies ahead of him and to prefer conflict to a smooth love affair. Although Louis is genuinely in love with Shirley, it is the chase, the attempt to master her, to display her as his captured prize, that brings him pleasure. In this narrative lies the artificial technique that undermines the success of the novel: Louis has decided to master Shirley, and his rationale and the process of his decision are laid before the reader; however, Shirley is about to relinquish her self in order to marry this man and he provides the only account of her decision. To make this sequence of events more believable, a narrative from Shirley's perspective would be necessary.

Louis' second journal entry is the last embedded narrative of the novel; it occurs in the last chapter before the epilogue and contains the details of his proposal to Shirley and the reaction of Mr. Sympson, her uncle, to the news of their engagement. The proposal takes the form of a complicated conversation between him and Shirley in which he talks about the possibility of travelling overseas and the kind of wife that he would need for such a life. Of course, he has no real intention of leaving; his words are an elaborate means of drawing Shirley into returning his declaration of love. The image of the leopardess returns and Shirley participates: "You name me leopardess: remember, the leopardess is tameless." Louis responds with a direct claim of ownership: "Tame or fierce, wild or subdued, you are *mine*" (3.13.623). Without warning, and in response to the suggestion of losing Louis forever, Shirley acquiesces to his claim: "I am glad I know my keeper, and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose" (623-24). Her willingness to be owned and commanded is uncharacteristic of the Shirley that conveyed her vision of Eve.

Shirley declares her love and accepts Louis' proposal, laying out her view of their relationship: "Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant; be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!" (624). Although she has sacrificed her position of power, Shirley expects that Louis will be her "companion" and "friend," but she is now in the submissive role.

Shirley's family reacts harshly to the news of her engagement to Louis. The barrier of class remains in the perception of their relationship, but Louis, confident in Shirley's love, defends their decision when she becomes so emotional that she collapses and is unable to speak for herself. She has surrendered her power and must rely on Louis, and this incident is perhaps her first indication of the difficult reality of her choice to marry him. Soon afterwards, she becomes distant and cool and Louis records her explanation of this change in her behaviour and attitude toward him: "You see I am in a new world, Mr. Moore. I don't know myself, - I don't know you" (631). In her decision to marry Louis, Shirley has followed her heart but has sacrificed so much that she no longer recognizes herself and cannot articulate her feelings. Louis perceives this shift and tries to get Shirley to set a wedding date; however, in doing so, he seems to push her further away and she "breathed a murmur, inarticulate yet expressive; darted, or melted, from my arms – and I lost her" (631). This moment is the last that is described between Louis and Shirley (their marriage is reported in the epilogue) and it reveals the profound way in which her character has changed; it also demonstrates the strangeness of this transformation. Shirley is suddenly a submissive, quiet, evasive person who cannot express herself and who does not inspire the imagination as she had done earlier in the novel.

Shirley makes her sacrifice for love and is not forced into marriage; however, it is clear that she is not happy. The epilogue describes her reluctance to set a wedding date, delaying it "day by day, week by week"; she is "at last, fettered to a fixed day: there she lay, conquered by love, and bound with a vow. Thus vanquished and restricted, she pined, like any other chained denizen of deserts" (3.14.637). The dynamics of power have completely reversed in their relationship, but there is not enough explanation for this reversal to justify the profound changes that occur in the last two chapters of the novel. Charlotte makes the shift in power central in the novel, but misses the opportunity to make clear her concerns about the problems that women face in this time. *Shirley* becomes not a social novel, but a love story, losing its focus and forcing the marriage plot in its conclusion. The Shirley that burst onto the scene in the second volume willingly relinquishes her power, but she does not seem completely happy: She is described as totally dependent on her husband, and does not retain any of the qualities that made her special as a character earlier in the novel.

Villette: The Power of the Autobiographer

Lucy Snowe is the least socially powerful of all Charlotte Brontë's heroines. Like Jane Eyre, she struggles to find her identity in a world in which she is powerless to control her life. Unlike Jane, Lucy does not find happiness, but a rather muted contentment followed by an ambiguous ending that suggests her lover's death. She is troubled throughout her story and it is only through the way she manipulates her writing that Lucy finds a measure of power. Returning to the autobiographical narrative form, Charlotte is able to create a complex heroine reminiscent of Jane Eyre; but she takes Lucy to another level, making her an unreliable narrator. Lucy is often misleading, confusing, and deceptive, and these qualities make it difficult to determine who she is and what she is saying about herself.

There are few embedded narratives in this lengthy novel and they are brief. The narratives of Miss Marchmont, Dr. John Graham Bretton, Paulina de Bassompierre, and Ginevra Fanshawe contain revelations about Lucy; however, it is also in what is implied in Lucy's perceptions that the truth can be found: "Lucy's deception and unreliability are the means by which she constructs a self-protective façade" (Nestor 87). Lucy's careful control over these narratives is demonstrated in the way she chooses them to allow another voice to speak only when it is necessitated by her own inability to relate that part of her story; however, these narratives rise above the level of plot convenience because of their revelations about Lucy and those that narrate.

Lucy actively guards herself throughout the novel and, therefore, does not present shocking or sudden revelations about herself or her life as does Jane Eyre. She is protecting herself from the real subject of her story – her separation from, and the death of, M. Paul (an event which is only implied). Every character of importance to Lucy, excluding those she considers her enemies (Mme. Beck, Père Silas, and Mme. Walravens), has a narrative, with the exception of M. Paul. Although she reveals to the reader that M. Paul tells her his story toward the end of the novel, she does not reproduce his words; rather, she summarizes the content of his narrative in the third person. Beginning with Miss Marchmont, Lucy hints at the fate of her lover and the life that she leads after their separation, but she describes the event and its aftermath vaguely and from a distance:

"The narrative is not only a means of conveying an experience, but also an attempt to comprehend that experience. The white-haired narrator is trying to find some way of admitting into her consciousness the memory of an almost unbearable loss" (Williams 79). M. Paul's story is told by Lucy; as a result, the reader is left with the story of a woman who exists in the past, in a "stasis of emotions" (Linder 98), misdirecting the reader because the truth is unspeakable. Through her writing, Lucy finds agency by exercising a measure of control over the presentation of her feelings and her efforts are evident in the embedded narratives.

Miss Marchmont's narrative is the most significant of the novel. Within it, and within the chapter in which it is contained, there are direct references to the ending of the novel, including images of storm, shipwreck, and the death of a lover. Miss Marchmont delivers her narrative on the night of her death, the night of a storm and a "Banshee" wind – images paralleled in Lucy's description of M. Paul's fate. She observes Miss Marchmont "directing her conversation to the past, and seeming to recall its incidents, scenes, and personages with singular vividness" (1.4.47). In her recollections, Miss Marchmont reflects Lucy's narrative style in that she is also immersed in the past and its details. Miss Marchmont is not, however, evasive or misleading in her account; she is willing to remember the night of her lover's death and delivers her narrative with a warmth and lightness of tone that indicates the release she feels: "I love Memory tonight . . . She is just now giving me a deep delight; she is bringing back to my heart, in warm and beautiful life, realities – not mere empty ideas – but what were once realities, and that I long have thought decayed, dissolved, mixed in with grave-mould" (47). Miss Marchmont does not view her memories as something to be avoided or denied; instead, she welcomes their presence in her mind as they "renew the love of my life" (47). The way in which she describes herself fits Lucy's own self-concept: "I am not a particularly good woman: I am not amiable. Yet I have had my feelings, strong and concentrated; and these feelings had their object; which, in its single self, was dear to me" (47).

Miss Marchmont's description of her lover's death and her perspective on her life after their separation may reflect the approach that Lucy takes as she writes her story. Miss Marchmont values the fact that she has experienced love and she has found a renewed faith: "This I can now see and say – if few women have suffered as I did in his loss, few have enjoyed what I did in his love . . . Inscrutable God, Thy will be done! And at this moment I can believe that death will restore me to Frank. I never believed it till now" (48). Lucy's means of avoiding the details of M. Paul's fate are echoed in the inability of Miss Marchmont to describe her feelings after she finds Frank near death: "How could I name that thing in the moonlight before me? or how could I utter the feeling which rose in my soul?" (49). Although there is never an explicit description of M. Paul's fate, Lucy's inability or unwillingness to utter it connects to the scene between Miss Marchmont and Frank, soon after which he dies. In an intriguing twist, Miss Marchmont expresses concern about her salvation because of her profound love for Frank: "I still think of Frank more than of God; and unless it be counted that in thus loving the creature so much, so long, and so exclusively, I have not at least blasphemed the Creator, small is my chance of salvation" (50). Similarly, Lucy struggles with religious melancholy and self-doubt intertwined with her feelings for Dr. John and M. Paul.

Ultimately, Miss Marchmont is connected to Lucy through the similarity of their situations. The financial help that Miss Marchmont promises arrives for Lucy at the end of the novel when she is alone, waiting for M. Paul, who never arrives. Lucy's prosperity places her in a position similar to that of her late employer: She is independent, alone, and soon to be separated from her lover, and these parallels suggest that Lucy has a similar kind of life in the present. The story has come full circle and the clues to M. Paul's fate and Lucy's current circumstances that are not articulated are found in the narrative of Miss Marchmont.

One of the constants in Lucy's life is her longing for companionship and love. Her loneliness drives her to despair during a summer vacation when she is driven to wander the streets of Villette; she is drawn to the Catholic church where she gives a "confession" to Père Silas. Collapsing on the street following this incident, Lucy finds herself in the Bretton home when she awakes. During her stay, Lucy visits with Dr. John and his narrative reveals the details of the night she collapsed. This narrative functions like those of Ginevra Fanshawe and Paulina de Bassompierre in that it reveals a part of Lucy's story that she does not directly witness. Outside the obvious utility of Dr. John's story, there is a demonstration of the dynamic between him and Lucy. There is a level of comfort that they display with each other, but Lucy clearly worries about what Dr. John thinks of her.

He entices Lucy into his narrative with a question in order to pique her curiosity and to create anticipation of his story: "Are you a Catholic? . . . The manner in which you were consigned to me last night, made me doubt" (2.17.230). Lucy's surprise at Dr. John's question is checked by her worry at the realization of the fact that she cannot remember how she came to be in his care. This disparity of knowledge puts Lucy at a disadvantage with which she is uncomfortable. She does not know what Dr. John has learned about her and must allow him to speak in order to discover what he knows.

He reveals that he was summoned by Père Silas to care for Lucy in her unconscious state. Lucy reacts strongly when Dr. John tells her of the priest's revelation "that you had been to him that evening at confessional; that your exhausted and suffering appearance, coupled with some things you had said . . ." (231). Lucy interrupts immediately: "Things I had said? I wonder what things?" (231). Before he reassures her, Dr. John takes a moment to tease Lucy: "Awful crimes, no doubt; but he did not tell me what: there, you know, the seal of the confessional checked his garrulity and my curiosity. Your confidences, however, had not made an enemy of the good father" (231). Again, Lucy interrupts, attempting to justify her presence in the confessional: "I suppose you will think me mad for taking such a step, but I could not help it . . . I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel . . . As to what I said, it was no confidence, no narrative. I have done nothing wrong . . . all I poured out was a dreary, desperate complaint" (231). Dr. John continues his narrative after commenting on Lucy's excitable nature; he cannot understand her reaction because he does not realize what lies behind it, namely her despair, caused in part by her realization that Dr. John does not have romantic feelings for her. He finishes describing the night that he found Lucy and then repeats his question: "Now, are you a Catholic?" – to which she replies with a smile, "Not yet" (233), showing a warmth and comfort that she is beginning to feel with him. She is also relieved that he has not discovered the details of her confession and accepts her explanation.

Paulina de Bassompierre's narrative is valuable for what it reveals about Lucy. The two women are friends, but their relationship is not an equal one. Lucy is at a distinct social disadvantage to her younger counterpart and their connection is one that is based on their past relationship. Paulina functions as Lucy's opposite in the novel, and in the romantic plot, her foil. Although she does not have a real opportunity to become involved romantically with Dr. John, Lucy's hope for a relationship of this kind is quelled when he and Paulina begin to fall in love. Paulina's narrative describes a letter that she received from Dr. John, and her enjoyment, almost reverence, of it parallel Lucy's own treatment of the letter that she received from him: "I carried my letter up-stairs, and having secured myself by turning the key in the door, I began to study the outside of my treasure: it was some minutes before I could get over the direction and penetrate the seal" (3.32.469). Lucy's discomfort with this description is evident in her short response to Paulina's question about Dr. John's signature: "I have seen it: go on" (469).

There is a chasm that exists between the kind of life that Paulina leads and that which Lucy experiences. For Lucy, this difference is exaggerated by the fact that Paulina cannot even comprehend a life that is unlike her own: "Life . . . is said to be full of pain to some. I have read biographies where the way-farer seemed to journey on from suffering to suffering . . . I have read of those who sowed in tears, and whose harvest, so far from being reaped in joy, perished by untimely blight, or was borne off by sudden whirlwind" (470). The suffering in the lives of the less fortunate is something Paulina has only read about and she has no frame of reference to understand someone like Lucy.

In including this narrative in her story, Lucy emphasizes that Paulina is naïve and out of touch with the realities of life. Lucy has reason to envy Paulina, but she does not for the simple fact that she cannot picture herself being satisfied with an empty, shallow existence. Subtly, Lucy is asserting an air of her own superiority with this narrative, as she does with Ginevra's. Her insecurity and misfortune have moulded her into a bitter, highly critical woman who cannot truly celebrate the happiness of those around her.

The final embedded narrative of the novel belongs to Ginevra Fanshawe. At first glance, it seems strange that Ginevra, a woman who seems to irritate Lucy and whom she believes to be shallow and materialistic, has the last narrative; however, the placement of this section is structurally necessary because it resolves the mystery of the "nun of the attic" and reveals Lucy's continuing need for human connection. It also frees Lucy from the constraints of the kind of love that Ginevra and Alfred represent: "she sees the limits, even the comic aspects, of romantic love, and that another love, painful and constant and intellectual, is now more interesting to her" (Gilbert and Gubar 434).

Ginevra, who does not understand Lucy, writes to announce and boast of her elopement and to reveal that the nun Lucy had encountered several times and believed to be a ghost was the Comte de Hamel wearing a disguise to facilitate his covert visits to Ginevra. The elopement and the nun conform to Ginevra's nature – she acts to get a reaction and to gain attention from those around her: "are you not mightily angry at my moonlight flitting and runaway match? I assure you it is excellent fun, and I did it partly to spite that minx, Paulina, and that bear, Dr. John – to show them that, with all their airs, I could get married as well as they" (3.40.593). Ginevra's flightiness extends to the way in which she handles objections to the marriage: "I found myself forced to do a little bit of the melodramatic" (593), and to her judgement of character: She cannot see her husband's faults (his shallowness and tendency to gamble), and she makes no mention of being in love. What is of importance to her is that everyone will know that she is "a countess now" (594).

Again, what is revealed in the narrative functions to bring together elements of the plot, but it is Lucy's reaction to this letter that is revealing. Although she claims to view Ginevra with disdain, Lucy values her friendship for the connection that it represents – and for the diversion she provides. Ginevra will do or say anything, a freedom that Lucy cannot indulge, but a quality she seems to admire. The friendship is of some importance to Lucy because she keeps in contact with Ginevra and seems amazed that she remembers her: "I thought she would forget me now, but she did not" (595). Ultimately, Lucy is the one that Ginevra seeks out when she needs support or help, and Lucy, although she does not take her for anything but what she is, appears to cherish their connection. As much as she seems to appreciate Ginevra, Lucy's inclusion of this narrative again allows her to assert her own superiority. Lucy spends much of the novel feeling out of place and inferior to those around her. In allowing Ginevra to speak in this narrative, she shows her, in her own words, to be shallow and melodramatic – qualities that Lucy does not admire. In presenting Ginevra in this light, Lucy is attempting, by implicit comparison, to make herself appear reflective, judicious, and righteous in her silent long-suffering.

Lucy fights "the battle of life" in the final chapters of the novel. She finds the connection for which she has been searching in M. Paul. The painful ending of the story is magnified by the fact that Lucy is unable to utter the words indicating that her separation from M. Paul is permanent. Although there is no explicit description of his fate, the ending of the novel is not a happy one. Lucy seems to be burying her pain beneath the text of her story, "creat[ing] her own narrative space in which she can allow her consciousness to expand, and where she can reinvent the world of her experience in and on her own terms" (Tanner 65). There is no way for Lucy to change what has happened, but in writing her story she asserts control over the perception of her life, making herself the heroine of her own tale and preserving the past in her own words. The act of reliving her story is cathartic for Lucy; it is an act that attempts to bring meaning through emotional experience.

Each of Charlotte Brontë's novels contains embedded narratives that raise points of interpretation for the text as a whole. In each of her novels, the dynamics of power are central to the existence of the heroine working within a system in which she is at a disadvantage because of her gender and social position. When the heroine succeeds, it is through her ability to shift the balance of power in her favour – whether it be through personal discovery or the written word; when the heroine fails, she succumbs to the challenges presented by her position. The embedded narratives in these novels are indicative of the larger story in which they appear, creating a picture of the conflicts and struggles at the heart of Charlotte's stories.

Conclusion

Embedded narratives play a significant role in the Brontë novels in their revelation of character through the subjectivity of the narrators. With the exception of the narratives of Zillah of *Wuthering Heights* and the innkeeper in *Jane Eyre*, these segments provide access to the inner world of the speaker, and in some cases, affect the reader's perceptions of the interlocutor. As these characters act as narrators, they come to life in the world of the novel. Their function as narrators is to provide alternative perspectives on events and characters that supplement and modify the views of the primary narrators. These narrative sites also contribute to the success or failure of their respective novels in that they reflect the larger story and its strengths and weaknesses.

Each of the Brontë sisters has her own distinctive way of using embedded narratives in her text, carefully choosing placement, narrator, and method of delivery to create vivid moments that are integrated into the surrounding story. For Anne Brontë, the embedded narrative is a tool with which she illustrates the personal and social implications of her characters' actions. Through the story of the title character, *Agnes Grey* presents the life of the governess as lonely and frustrating, highlighted by the narratives of her charges; Agnes' innate goodness and faith, the qualities that allow her to find happiness, are displayed in the narrative of Nancy Brown. The realities of the class divide are also demonstrated in the separation between the social positions represented by Agnes, Nancy, and the Murrays. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne complicates her social approach by placing a measure of blame on her heroine for the circumstances in which she finds herself. The narratives of Rose and Mrs. Markham, Arthur Huntingdon, and Mr. Hargrave reveal that Helen chooses to marry a rake in order to reform him, but the difficulties that stand between her and happiness are the constraints of the community in which she lives.

Emily Brontë places the world of her novel largely outside the perameters of societal norms. Although class does influence the interplay between characters, *Wuthering Heights* is not a social novel. The characters that deliver narratives are those central to the emotional whirlwind that blows through the novel and the dangers of emotional extremes is portrayed through their words. These narratives, which reveal the damaged souls that inhabit these spheres, demonstrate the incompatibility of the worlds of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, representing wild abandon and refined restraint respectively. It is only after the extremes have been exorcised that a balance is established by the moderate union of opposites in Catherine II and Hareton Earnshaw.

Charlotte Brontë's novels address the social problems that women encounter through the journeys of her focal characters: Jane Eyre, Shirley Keeldar, and Lucy Snowe. Each of these heroines is faced with a struggle for identity and agency and the difficulties of love relationships that threaten her autonomy. In *Jane Eyre*, the embedded narratives function as mirrors, reflecting an image of Jane back onto herself (an image that is examined in retrospect as the mature Jane narrates her own story); she must overcome the agendas of those who speak to her and define her self without the influence of the men who would use her. Shirley Keeldar possesses agency upon her entrance into the novel, but she chooses to surrender it because it is incompatible with her desire to marry for love. The novel fails, however, because Shirley's journey from selfhood to subservience is not documented in a believable manner, leaving the reader with questions and a problematic transformation with which to contend. In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe's reticence leads the reader down a winding path; she reveals truths and holds back information in an attempt to define herself through the writing of her story, crafting her tale in an attempt to bring meaning to her existence. Her inclusion of embedded narratives is limited, and they function to reveal small pieces of Lucy's true self along with the revelation of the character of the speaker as necessary for the story.

Through these narratives, the Brontës create lasting images, woven into the textual design of the novels, that provide a revelation of character through the subjectivity of the narrators. There is an intimacy in these sections that allows for an understanding of the intricacies of character that would not be possible without these narratives. It is because of these first-person revelations that there are few embedded narratives that would not be easily recalled by the critic and the casual reader. It is the skillful use of this type of narrative that demonstrates the artistic power of the Brontë sisters.

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